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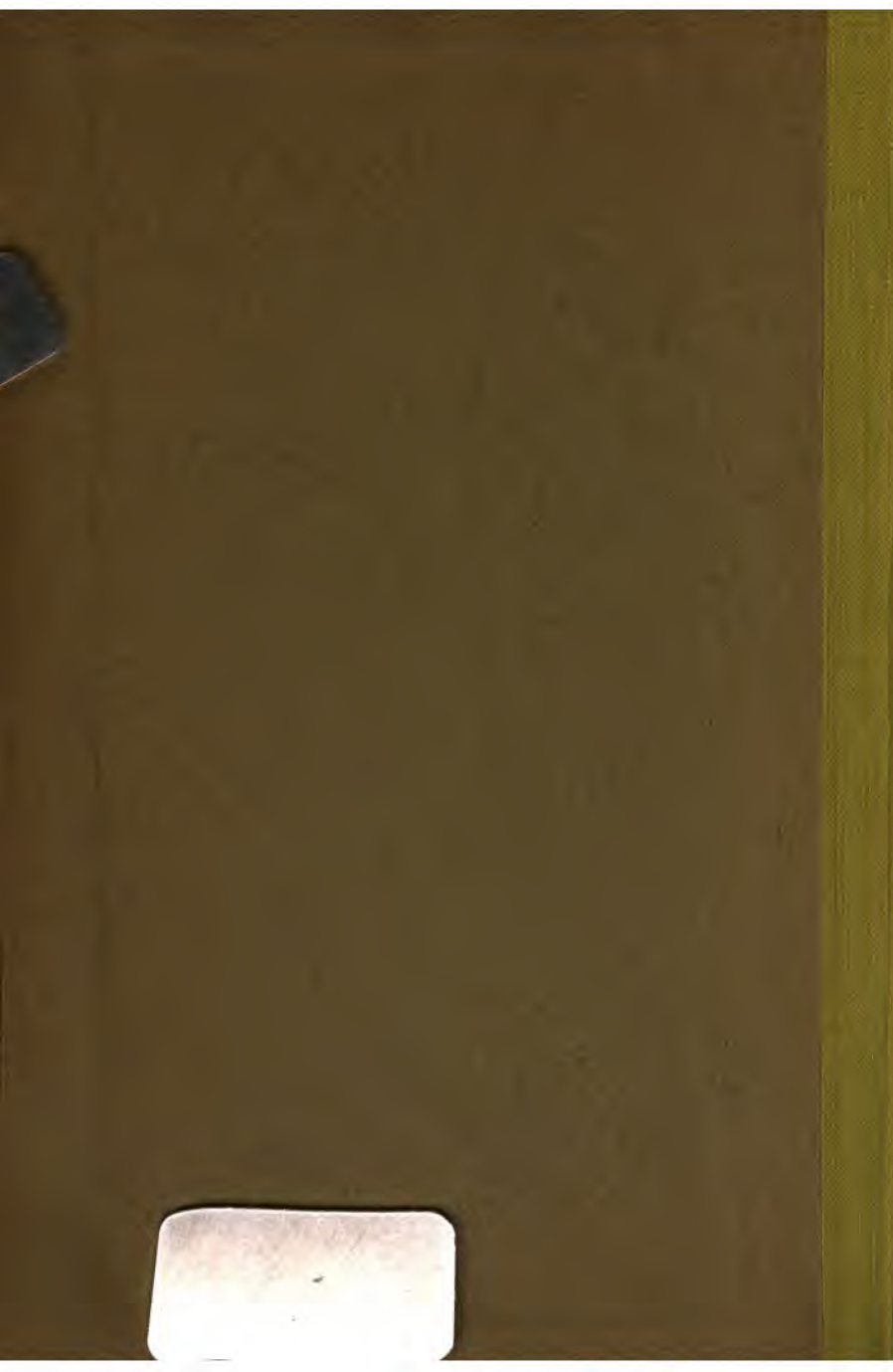
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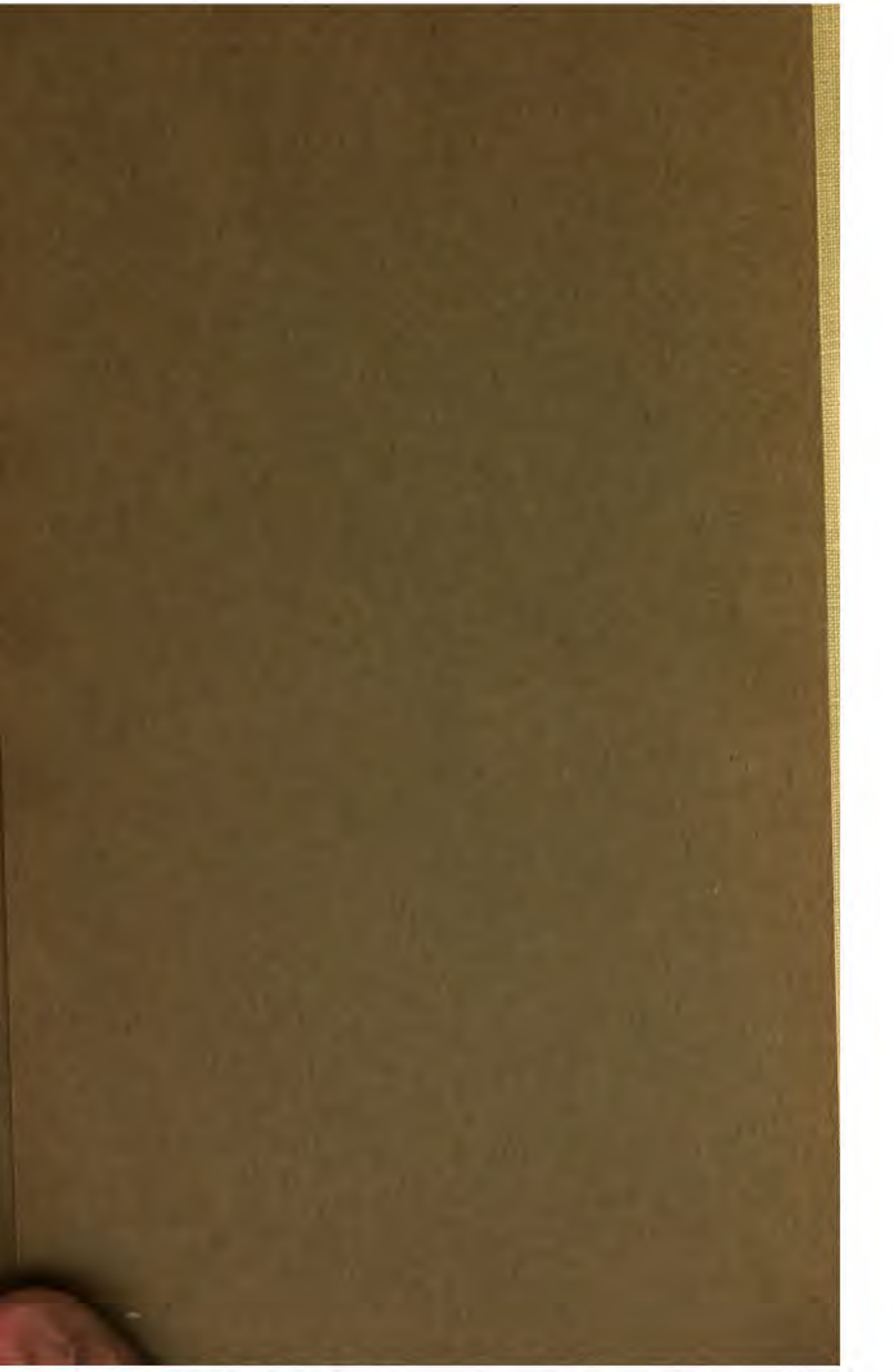
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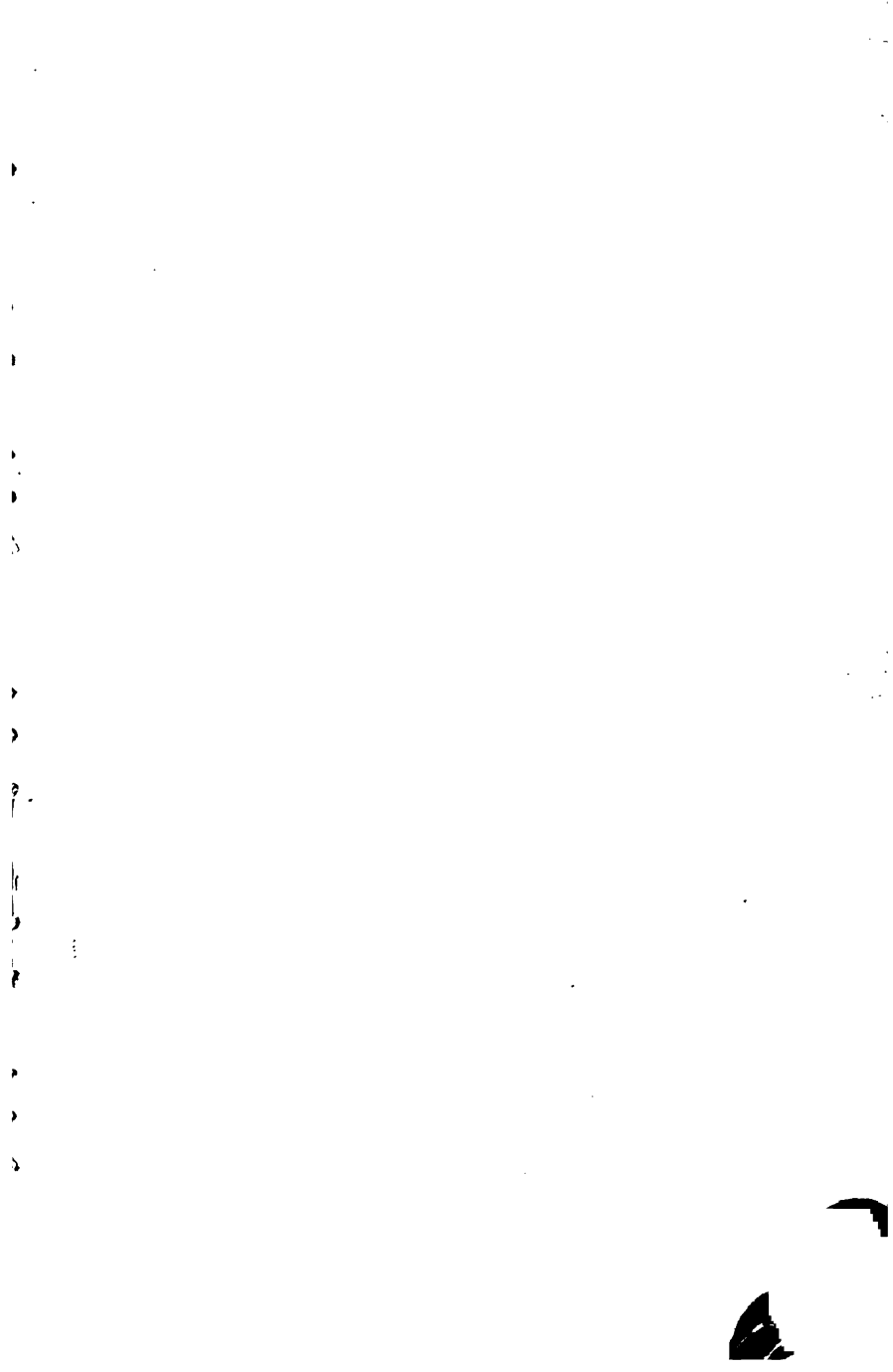


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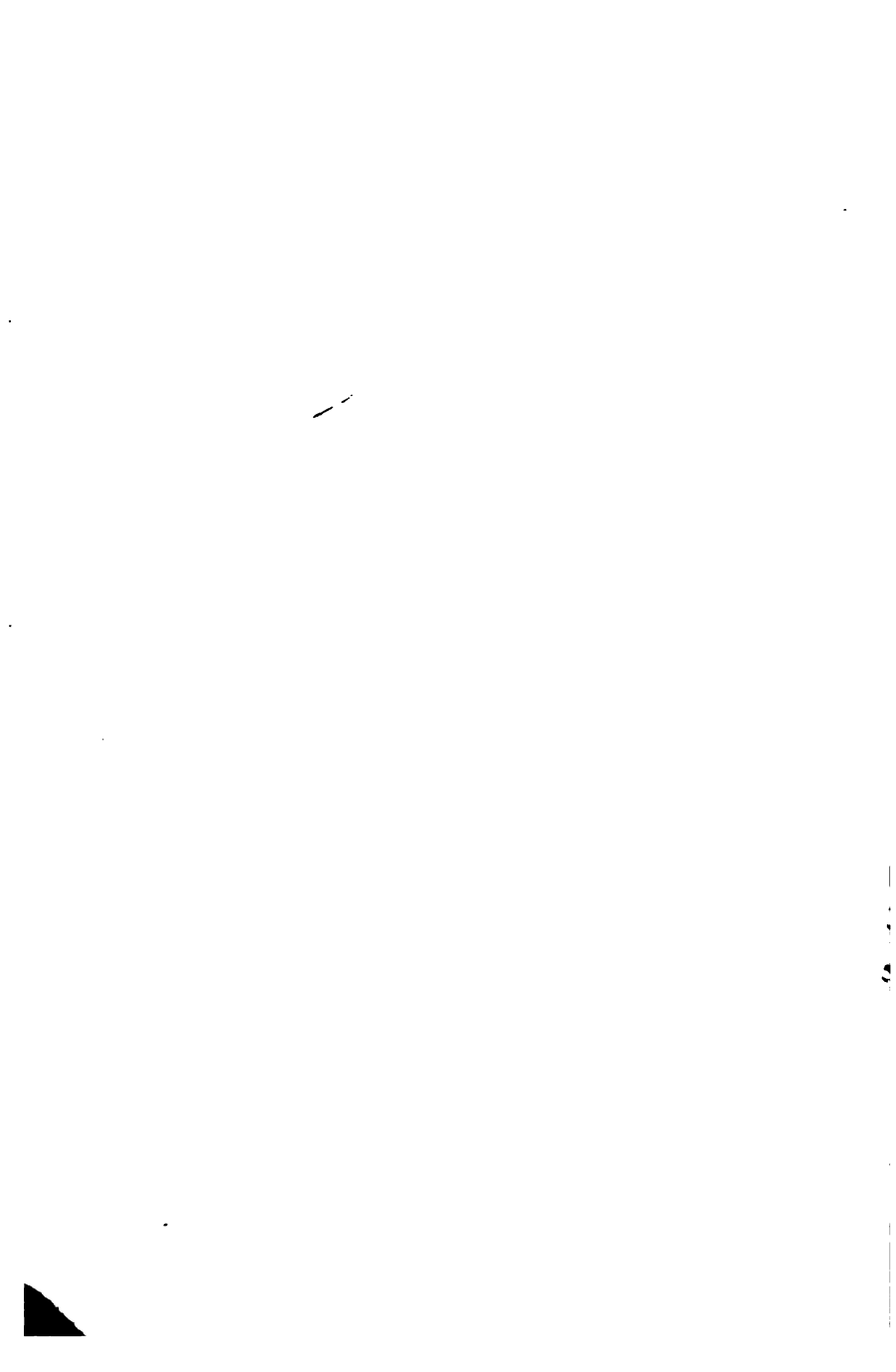






THE FOURTH ESTATE





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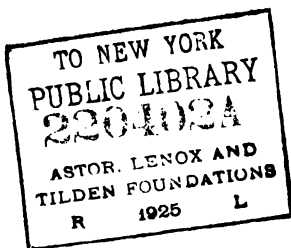
*Authorized translation
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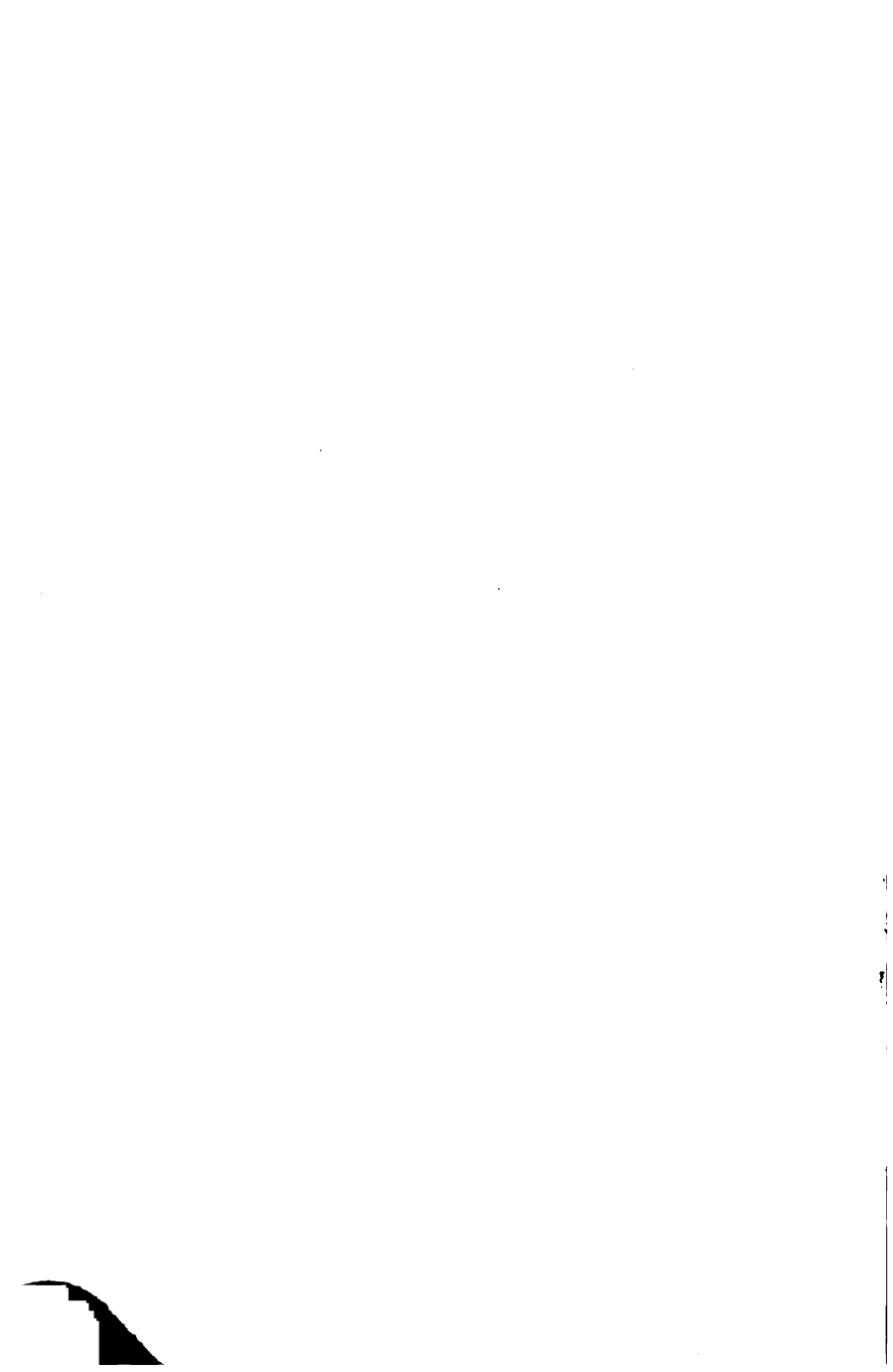
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THE FOURTH ESTATE





The Fourth Estate

CHAPTER I

THE CURTAIN RISES

SARRIO, the well-known town on the Cantabrian coast, boasted some years ago of a theatre neither bright, light, nor commodious, but quite good enough to afford entertainment to the pacific, industrious residents during the long winter evenings.

It was built, as such places mostly are, in the form of a horseshoe, and it consisted of two floors above the ground one. On the first were the boxes—goodness knows why they were so called, for they were nothing but a few benches stuffed with goat's hair and upholstered with scarlet flannel, placed behind a balustrade. To take one of these places, a push had to be given to the back, which raised the seat with a spring, and once the person was in it readjusted itself, and he was as comfortable as a human being can be on an instrument of torture. On the second floor all the rabble vociferated, scuffled, and pushed, irrespective of social distinctions between the well-to-do seaman, the poor mussel-picker from the rocks and pier, and Amalia, the respected dealer, and the sellers in the streets. This part of the house was called the gallery. The stage-boxes were of the same wretched style as the others, and the uphol-

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stering seemed to be the same, as far as one could see. Beyond them came the parterre, reserved, according to the old-fashioned way, for certain handicraftsmen, who, from their calling, their position as employers, or for any reason, were averse to going up into the gallery and mixing with the common herd. From the roof hung a prismatic cut-glass chandelier, lighted with common oil, which was subsequently replaced by petroleum; but that reform I never saw. Under the staircase leading to the boxes there was an alcove, enclosed by a curtain, which went by the name of "Don Mateo's loge." Of this Don Mateo, more anon.

Then you must know that in this provincial theatre the same dramas and comedies were played as in the capital, and the same operas given as at La Scala in Milan. Incredible as it seems, it is perfectly true. There the narrator of this story heard for the first time the famous lines:

"When you hearken to a story of shipwreck,
All on earth, e'en to love, is forgotten."

They certainly struck him as splendid, and the theatre a marvel of luxury and good taste. Everything in the world depends on imagination. Would that mine were as fresh and vivid as it was in those days, so as to be able to give you a few hours' pleasant amusement!

There it was I saw "Don Juan Tenorio," with its flour-whitened corpses, its commander gliding away on a door pulled with cords, its infernal regions made of lighted spirits of wine; and its apotheosis of paper, stuffing, and packing-cases made such an impression on me that I never slept that night. In the auditorium the same things went on more or less as in the grandest houses of the capital. However, more attention was

The Curtain Rises

given to the performance here than in Court theatres, because we had not arrived at that high state of culture in which behavior is in direct contradiction to the place—swearing and chattering in playhouses, laughing and giggling in church, and silence and sedateness at the promenade, after the delightful fashion in Madrid. I do not know if they have attained to this state of culture in Sarrio by now.

But it must not be thought that there were not some enlightened spirits who were sufficiently advanced to give a sample of correct manners at the theatre. Pablito de Belinchon was one of these. With three or four kindred spirits he had a season ticket for one of the stage-boxes, and from thence they spoke across to other gentlemen, older men, who subscribed to the opposite stage-box. They cracked jokes, they turned the soprano or bass into ridicule, and they threw sweets and pellets of paper. The people in the gallery, not yet conversant with this advanced stage of refinement, loudly insisted on silence. The families of importance arriving, as usual, after the curtain had risen, came in with as much fuss as if they were passing into the dress-circle of the Royal Theatre, and, be it said, with much more noise, for it is impossible to imagine the horrible sounds with which the backs of the boxes were pushed back, and the seats dropped, as if on purpose to attract attention. The party now making its pompous entry into one of these boxes remains standing until all wraps are removed, while the eyes of the audience are instantly turned from the stage and fixed upon the newcomers until they are seated. They are the Belinchons. The head of the family is a tall, spare gentleman, with bent shoulders, bald head, small sharp eyes, a large mouth, wreathed with a Mephistophelian smile, disclosing two long even

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rows of teeth, the *chef d'œuvre* of a certain dentist, recently established in Sarrio; he had whiskers and moustache, and his age was about sixty.

He was reported to be the richest merchant in the town, being one of the chief importers of codfish on the Biscayan coast. For many years he had the entire monopoly of the wholesale trade of this commodity, not only in the town, but in the provinces, and had thus amassed a considerable fortune.

His wife, Doña Paula—but why does her arrival excite so much talk in the theatre? The good lady, hearing it, trembles, looks confused, and, being unable to collect herself sufficiently to take off her cloak by herself, she is relieved of it by her daughter, who says in her ear:

“Sit down, Mamma.”

Doña Paula sits down, or, to speak more correctly, she drops into a seat, and casts an anxious look at the audience, while her cheeks are suffused with crimson. In vain she tries to collect and calm herself, but the more she tries to keep the blood from rushing to her face the more it mounts to that prominent position.

“Mamma, how red you are!” said Venturita, her younger daughter, trying not to laugh.

The mother looked at her with a pained expression.

“Hush, Ventura, hush,” said Cecilia.

Doña Paula then murmured: “The child delights in upsetting me,” and nearly burst into tears.

At last the audience, wearied of tormenting her with their glances, smiles, and whispers, turned their attention to the stage. Doña Paula's distress gradually diminished, but the traces remained for the rest of the evening.

The cause of the excitement was the velvet mantle,

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trimmed with fur, that the good lady had donned. It was always like this whenever she appeared for the first time in any fine article of apparel. And this for no other reason than because Doña Paula was not a lady by birth.

She had belonged to the cigarette-maker class. Don Rosendo had made love to her when she was quite a young girl, and then came the birth of Pablito. However, Don Rosendo let five or six years elapse without marrying, not wishing to hear of matrimony, but continuing to pay court to her and assisting her with money, until finally, vanquished more by the love of the boy than the mother, and more than all by the admonitions of his friends, he decided to offer his hand to Paulina. The town knew nothing of the marriage until it had taken place, secrecy being considered the safest course. From thenceforth the life of the cigarette-maker can be divided into different epochs. The first, which lasted for a year, dated from the time of her marriage until the "mantilla appeared." During this epoch she did not go out much, nor was she often seen in public. On Sundays she attended early mass, and the rest of the time she was shut up in the house. When she decided to don the aforementioned mantilla and attend eleven o'clock mass she was the cynosure of all eyes, in church as well as on her way through the streets; and the event was talked about for eight days afterwards.

The second epoch, which lasted three years, was from the "mantilla episode" to that of "the gloves." The sight of such an adornment on the large dark hands of the ex-cigarette-maker produced an indescribable sensation in the feminine element of the neighborhood; in the streets, in church, and on visits, the ladies met each other with the question:

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"Have you seen?"

"Yes, yes; I have seen."

And then the tongues were loosed in cruel remarks.

Then came the third epoch, which lasted four years, and ended with the silk dress, which gave almost as much cause of complaint as the gloves, and produced universal indignation in Sarrio.

"Do you really mean to say so, Doña Dolores?"

"Who would have thought it?"

Doña Dolores lowered her eyes with a despairing gesture.

Finally the last epoch, the longest of all, for it lasted six years, terminated (oh! horror!) with "the hat." The shudder of disgust that went through the town of Sarrio when Doña Paula appeared one holiday afternoon at the Promenade with a little hat on her head beats description. It caused quite a sensation: the women of the place made the sign of the cross, as they saw her pass, and remarks were uttered in loud tones so as to reach the person concerned.

"Look, girl, do for goodness' sake, look at the Serena, and see what she has got on her head."

Mention must be made that Doña Paula's mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother had all gone by the name of Serena. It is needless to add that even when the cigarette-maker attained to the dignity of señora, she was never by any chance given her proper name.

When the ladies of Sarrio met each other in the street the following day there were no words to express their horror; they could only raise their eyes to Heaven, make convulsive gesticulations, and utter, with a groan, the word "Hat!"

So at that deed of daring, only comparable to those of heroes of antiquity, like Hannibal, Cæsar, and Genghis

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Khan, the town remained crushed and dumfounded for some months. Nevertheless, whenever Doña Paula appeared in public with the abhorred hat upon her head, or with any other departure from her old attire, she was always greeted with a murmur of disapproval. The fault of the matter lay in her never having resented, in public or in private, or even in the sanctum of her own feelings, against this malignant treatment of her fellow-townfolk. She considered it natural and reasonable, and it never occurred to her that it ought not to have been; her ideas of conventionality had never prompted her to rebel against the tyranny of public opinion. She believed in all good faith that in adopting the gloves, the mantilla, or the hat, she had committed a breach of laws both human and divine, and that the murmurs and mocking glances were the just retribution for the infraction. Hence her terror and dismay every time she appeared at the theatre or promenade overwhelmed her with confusion.

"Why, then," it will be said, "did Doña Paula dress herself thus?"

Those who ask such questions are not well versed in the mysteries of the human heart; Doña Paula put on the mantilla, gloves, and hat with the full knowledge of the retribution to come, just as a boy stuffs himself from the sideboard, knowing that he will be punished for the act. Those who have not been brought up in a little town can never know how ardently the hat is desired by the artisan.

It was so with Doña Paula, old, faded, and withered as she was. As a young girl, she had been pretty, but years, her secluded life, to which she could never accustom herself, and, above all, her struggle against public opinion in the adoption of appropriate attire, had pre-

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maturely aged her ; but she still had beautiful black eyes set in regular and pleasing features.

The first act was nearly over. A fantastic melodrama, the name I do not remember, was being performed, and the company had brought into play all the scenic apparatus at its disposal. The audience was impressed, and received every change of scene with enthusiastic applause. Pablito, who had spent a month in Madrid the previous year, made light of the performance and winked knowingly at his friend in the front row of the stalls. Then, to show how boring he found it all, he ended by turning his back on the stage, and levelling his opera glasses at the local beauties. Every time that the Russian-leather lorgnettes were turned on one of the fair sex the girl trembled slightly, changed her position, and raised her hand, which slightly shook, to adjust her hair, smiled meaninglessly at her mamma or sister, settled herself afresh, and fixed her eyes on the stage with insistence and decision, but a quick shy glance was soon raised to those round, bright glasses directed at her, and she ended by blushing. Then Pablito, having carried his point, turned his attention to another beauty. He knew them all as well as if they were his sisters, he *tutoyed* the majority of them, and to several he had even been engaged ; but he was as light and inconsistent in his love affairs as a feather in the air ; the girls had all had to undergo the painful process of disillusion, and finally, wearied of courting his neighbors, he proceeded to exercise his charms on some of the visitors to Sarrio, only, of course, to throw them over, if they imprudently stayed more than a month or two in the town.

There were weighty reasons for Pablito's power to thus make havoc at his own sweet will in the hearts

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of all the girls of the place, as well as of those from other parts. He was a very aristocratic-looking young fellow of four or five and twenty, of a handsome, manly countenance, and slight well-formed figure. Then he rode splendidly, and drove a tilbury or carriage and four with an ease only seen in Sarrio among coachmen. When wide trousers were worn, Pablito's looked like skirts, and when tight ones were the fashion his legs looked as slender as a stork's. When high collars were in vogue, Pablito went about half-strangled with his tongue hanging out, and when low ones came in, he had them cut down to his breastbone. These and other striking characteristics made him irresistible. Perhaps some people will not quite credit the universal admiration he excited, but I am certain that the girls of the province who read this story will testify to the truth of the fact.

When the curtain fell, a bent old man with spectacles and a long white beard crept, rather than walked, to the Belinchons' box.

"Don Mateo! You never miss a performance," exclaimed Doña Paula.

"Well, what would you have me do at home, Paulina?"

"Tell your beads and go to bed," said Venturita.

Don Mateo smiled benignantly and answered the pert remark by giving the girl an affectionate tap on her cheek.

"It is true I ought to do so, my child—but what is to be done? If I go to bed early I do not sleep—and then I cannot resist the temptation of seeing you pretty little dears."

Venturita's coquettish expression betrayed her satisfaction at seeing herself admired.

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"Now, if you were a handsome young man!"

"I have been one."

"In what year was that?"

"How naughty! how naughty the child is!" exclaimed Don Mateo, laughing, but he was here interrupted by a fit of coughing which lasted for some minutes.

Don Mateo, an old man, and decrepit not only with age, but with infirmities brought on by a dissipated life, was the delight of the town of Sarrio. No festivity and no public or private entertainment could take place without him. He had been president of the Lyceum, a dancing club, for many years, and nobody thought of having him supplanted. He was also president of an academy of music, of which he was the founder; he was treasurer of the artisans' club; the rebuilding of the theatre now mentioned was due to him; and as an acknowledgment of the time and money he spent on it, the company permitted him to have the box, already alluded to, in the alcove under the staircase, enclosed with curtains.

He lived on his pension as colonel; he was married, and had a daughter over thirty years of age, who still went by the name of "the child." It must not be thought by this that Don Mateo was a skittish old man. If he had been, the weaker sex would not have been so profuse in their sympathy and respect for him. His sole pleasure was to see other people amused and happy about him, and he spared himself neither trouble nor efforts in getting up any fresh entertainment. Once his mind was set upon a new idea, his energy never flagged. Sometimes he organized a country ball; another time he had a stage put up in the large room of the Lyceum, and got up a play; and he occasionally

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chartered a mountebank or musical company. If a week went by without Sarrio having some entertainment or other, Don Mateo was in a great state of mind, and had no rest until he had started something.

Thanks to him, we can safely say that at this period there was no place in Spain where life was rendered so easy and pleasant as at Sarrio, for a constant round of simple amusements engenders union and friendliness among the townsfolk. Moreover, Don Mateo was the peacemaker *par excellence*, for he made a point of smoothing away all the bad feelings and misunderstandings that always crop, up in a town. Unlike bad persons who delight in fanning the flame of dissension, he found delight in repeating to people all the pleasant things he heard of them.

"Pepita, do you know what Doña Rosario said just now about the dress you have on?—that it is most elegant, *recherché*, and tasteful."

Whereupon Pepita, filled with pride as she sat in her box, cast quite an affectionate glance at Doña Rosario, little as she liked her.

Then, again, "How well you managed Villamor's chocolate business for the widow and children, friend Eugenio—you did, indeed. Don Rosendo was just telling me he let the business slip through his fingers like a fool."

As Don Rosendo was the best man of business in the town, Don Eugenio could not help feeling flattered at these words.

After chatting for some little time with the Belinchon family, Don Mateo took leave, to prosecute his visits to the other boxes, as usual; but before going he turned to Cecilia, and said:

"When does he arrive?"

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The young girl flushed slightly, and replied :

"I cannot tell you, Don Mateo."

Then Doña Paula, smiling mischievously, came to her daughter's rescue, by saying :

"He ought to arrive in the 'Bella Paula,' which sailed from Liverpool."

"Oh ! then we shall be having him here to-morrow or next day. You have prayed a good deal to the Virgin de las Tormentas, eh ?"

"She has actually had a *nones*. And six candles have been burning for days before the image," said Venturita.

Cecilia's blush deepened, and she smiled. She was a young woman of twenty years of age, neither beautiful in face nor graceful in figure ; the harmony of her features was spoiled by her nose being too aquiline. Without this drawback she would not have been plain, for her eyes were extremely good—so soft and expressive that few beauties could rival them. She was neither tall nor short, but rather thin, and her shoulders slightly bent. Her sister Venturita was sixteen years of age, and as full of grace and beauty as a lovely flower. Her oval cheeks seemed made of roses and pinks ; she was somewhat *petite*, but so perfectly made that she looked like a wax model. Her jasmine-like hands and her fairy-like feet were the talk of Sarrio.

The softness and smoothness of her skin were like mother-of-pearl and alabaster ; her creamy forehead, high and narrow as that of a Greek Venus, was shaded by fair curls ; and rich, abundant golden tresses covered her shoulders and fell below her waist.

"You may laugh at your sister, little one ; but it will not be long before you do the same !" said Don Mateo.

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"I pray for a man ! You are getting imbecile, sir."

"It won't be long before I hear of it," returned the old man, as he passed on to another box to greet the señores de Maza.

At that moment Pablito joined his family, accompanied by his faithful friend, who merits special notice.

He was the son of the *picador* of the place, and the cast of the lad's features was such as would have been the delight of the spectators at a circus. His face would have required no addition in the way of powder, rouge, or dye to convert him into a clown. The nose, highly colored by nature, the narrow slits of eyes, the lack of any moustache or whiskers, the thick lips, the excessive width of his shoulders, the bow of his legs, and, above all, the facial contortions which accompanied every word he uttered, were provocative of mirth without the aid of paint or wig. Piscis, for so he was called, was aware of this peculiarity, and resented it so intensely that he resolved to counteract the ludicrous cast of his features by determining never to laugh, and he religiously kept to his decision. Moreover, he, for the same reason, interspersed his remarks with the sharpest, strongest interjections of the vernacular, varied by those of his own invention. But this, instead of producing the desired effect, only added to the amusement he provoked among his acquaintances.

The only person who ever took him seriously, up to a certain point, was Pablito. Piscis and Pablito were born to inspire each other with mutual love and admiration. The point of union between the two kindred spirits was "the cult of the horse-god." Piscis, through his father, was an adept in that line from a child ; and as the best mount in Sarrio, he was the object of

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Pablito's warmest admiration, and the son of Don Rosendo being the richest young fellow of the place, there was, according to Piscis, no person in the world more deserving of respect and admiration. Nobody knew when this friendship began; Pablito and Piscis had always been inseparable from the time they were children, and the difference of their social positions had not separated them as they grew up to manhood. Don Rosendo's stable was their constant place of meeting; from thence, after a long and erudite conference, partly theoretical, partly practical on the horses, they proceeded to betake their presence and their profound knowledge to the town, where they took a few turns, sometimes on high-spirited horses, and at other times in a smart trap, with Pablito driving, and Piscis absorbed in affectionate contemplation of the backs of the animals. On some occasions, however, they gave the town a lesson of humility by perambulating on their own legs. Pablito now came up to his family party convulsed with laughter.

"What has come to you?" asked Doña Paula, smiling in sympathy.

"We just followed Periquito to the gallery, and there we found him hand in hand with Ramona," whispered the young man into his sister Venturita's ear.

"Well, what did he say?" she asked with great curiosity.

"He said"—and here a burst of laughter interrupted him for some minutes—"he said, 'Ramona, I love you.'"

"Ave Maria! and an anchovy seller, too!" exclaimed the girl, joining in the laugh, and making the sign of the cross.

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"If you could have heard the trembling voice in which he said it, and the way in which he turned up the whites of his eyes—Ah, here is Piscis, who was also witness of it."

Piscis gave vent to a corroborative grunt. At that moment Periquito, a pallid, *chetif* lad, with blue eyes and a little, thin red beard, appeared in one of the stage boxes; the eyes of the whole Belinchon family were at once turned on him with mocking and smiling glances, Pablito and Venturita evincing particular delight at the sight of the young man. Periquito raised his head and saluted them, and the Belinchon family responded to the greeting without ceasing laughing. He raised his eyes two or three times, but those continual mocking glances so confused him that he at last retired into the narrow foyer. The curtain then rose again: the scene now represented caverns in the infernal regions, although it was not impossible for them to be mistaken for the hold of a ship.

The Act opened with a prelude by the orchestra, worthily conducted by Señor Anselmo, the cabinet-maker of the town.

Señor Matias, the sacristan, and Señor Manola, the barber, took part in the performance as bassoon-players. Don Juan, the "old salt," as he was nicknamed, and Prospero, the carpenter, played the clarionets; the trumpet-players were Mechacan, the shoemaker, and Señor Romualdo, the undertaker; Pepe de la Esquila, the lawyer's clerk, and Maroto, "the watchman," were the cornet-players; and the fiddle was played by Señor Benito, the violinist of the church, and a clerk in a house of business; whilst the minor accompanists consisted of four or five apprentice youths of the town.

Instead of a bâton, Señor Anselmo held in his hand

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an enormous bright key, which was that of his shop, and served to conduct the music.

The prelude was very sad and mournful, suggestive of a fitting state of mind for the infernal regions. The audience preserved absolute silence, and in anxious expectation of what was to come all eyes were fixed on the open trap-doors in the stage floor. A discordant note suddenly broke in upon the soft, mysterious music. Señor Anselmo turned and cast a reproachful look at the offending musician, who colored up to his eyes; and there came a loud, prolonged murmur of disapproval from the audience, whilst from the gallery a voice cried :

“It was Pepe de la Esquila !”

All eyes were then directed to the delinquent, who, drawing the mouthpiece from his cornet, shook it with assumed indifference whilst his face became redder and redder.

“Those who cannot play should go to bed,” cried the same voice.

Then the abashed and ashamed Pepe de la Esquila was fraught with fury. He threw his instrument upon the ground, rose from his seat with his eyes aflame with rage, shook his fist at the gallery, and cried :

“I’ll settle you when we get out, see if I don’t.”

“Sh ! sh ! Silence, silence !” exclaimed the audience in a breath.

“What is there to settle, man ? Get on and play the cornet better.”

“Silence, silence ! Shame !” cried the audience again, and all eyes were then turned to the *alcalde’s* box.

He was a man of sixty or seventy years of age, short

The Curtain Rises

of stature and very high-colored; his hair was still thick and quite white, his cheeks were shaven, his nose Roman, and his eyes were large, round, and prominent. He looked like a courtier of the time of Louis XV., or a coachman of some grand house.

Don Roque, for such was his name, turned round in his seat, and called out in a stentorian voice :

“ Marcones.”

Whereupon an octogenarian official approached the door of the box with his shiny, peaked, blue cloth cap in his hand.

The *alcalde* conferred with him for some minutes; and then Marcones ascended the gallery, and reappeared holding a young man in sailor dress by the arm. They both approached the *alcalde's* box, and then Don Roque proceeded to rebuke the offender in a voice which he only partially succeeded in modulating, for, from time to time, one overheard such remarks as—
“ Disturber of the peace ! Have you no manners whatsoever ! You are a belligerent animal ! Do you think you are in a tavern ? ”

The sailor received the reprimand with his eyes on the ground.

A voice cried from the pit :

“ Let him be taken to prison.”

Then another voice from the gallery immediately returned :

“ Let Pepe de la Esquila be taken too.”

“ Silence ! Silence ! ”

The *alcalde*, after having sharply rebuked Percebe, let him return to his seat, to the great delight of the gallery, who received him back with hurrahs and applause.

The orchestra, silenced for a time, now resumed the

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prelude of the infernal regions, and before it was finished a dozen devils were seen emerging through the trap-doors on to the stage with masks, enormous tow wigs, the inevitable tails, and with lighted torches in their hands. Then, when they were all assembled on the boarded floor and the trap-doors were conveniently closed, they began the fantastic dance befitting the occasion. But it is known of old that four demons cannot join together in a dance without getting excited. The spectators followed their swift, measured movements with extreme interest. A child began to cry, and the audience made its mother withdraw him from the house.

But, lo and behold ! with so much passing to and fro of Beelzebub's ministers in that not very spacious place, a torch ignited the tow wig of one of the party. The poor devil, in ignorance of the fact, continued the dance with most diabolical energy; the audience went into fits of laughter awaiting the *dénouement* of the accident, and actually, when he felt his head grow hot, he promptly tore off the wig and mask, and disclosed the countenance of Levita, distorted with terror.

"Levita !" cried the delighted audience.

The owner of this nickname, deprived of his demoniacal disguise, retired from the scene, covered with confusion.

In a short time another wig was set on fire. Fresh cries of excitement at the approaching metamorphosis of the demon. There was not long to wait, for in a few minutes the wig and the mask flew through the air like a flaming comet.

"Matalaosa !" was the universal cry, and a shout of laughter rang through the theatre.

The Curtain Rises

"Matala, don't be afraid that you will catch cold," said a voice from the gallery.

Matalaosa retired, discomfited, like his companion Levita.

Two or three more wigs were set on fire, exposing to shame as many more well-known faces of townfolk who acted as supers at the theatre. The dance finally terminated without further mishap.

The demons who had escaped any catastrophe being once more relegated to the infernal regions, there appeared on the scene a fine young fellow, who, to judge from the skin which hung from his shoulder, was evidently a shepherd, with a pretty young girl of the same profession, and, according to the old rule which obliges every shepherd to be in love, and every shepherdess to be coquettish, the dialogue began, in which the affectionate entreaties and tender reproaches of the man contrasted strongly with the light laughter and jokes of the girl.

Everybody was pleased and delighted, the gallery as well as the pit, with the touching scene enacted, when a loud voice was heard at the theatre door saying :

"Don Rosendo, the 'Bella Paula' is coming in."

The effect that this unexpected news produced was indescribable, for not only did Don Rosendo jump up, as if he were pulled by a spring, and hasten to put on his cloak with a trembling hand, but such excitement pervaded the whole gathering that the pastoral dialogue was all but interrupted. The patrons of the *parterre* rushed with one accord into the street, all the sailors made their exit from the gallery with a great clatter, and many people also left the stalls and boxes. In a few minutes there was hardly anybody in the theatre but women.

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Cecilia remained motionless and pale, with her eyes fixed on the stage. Her mother and sister looked at her with a smile on their faces.

“Why do you look at me like that?” she exclaimed, turning round suddenly and blushing violently, whereupon Doña Paula and Venturita burst out laughing.

The "Bella Paula"

CHAPTER II

SAFE ARRIVAL OF THE "BELLA PAULA"

THE crowd of people ran through the streets in the direction of the port. Foremost, accompanied by six or eight sailors, his son Pablo and several friends, came Don Rosendo, silent and preoccupied as he listened to his companions' remarks, uttered in voices panting from exertion.

"Don Domingo is in luck to get in at nearly high tide," said a sailor, alluding to the captain of the "Bella Paula."

"How do you know he is coming in? He may have cast anchor this afternoon," remarked another.

"Where?"

"You ask 'where?' you fool! Why, in the Bay, of course," replied the other in a rage.

"If so, we should see her, Uncle Miguel."

"How could we see her, you idiot? Why shouldn't she have dropped anchor behind the Corvera Rock?"

"The flag of the 'Bella Paula' would float higher than the rock, Uncle Miguel."

"Whatever do you know about it?"

"What cargo does it carry?" asked a bystander of the owner.

"Four thousand hundredweight."

"From Scotland?"

"No, all from Norway."

"Is the Señorita de las Cuevas on board?"

Don Rosendo did not reply; but after a few more quick steps he turned round, saying:

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"I say, Don Melchor must be told that the 'Bella Paula' is coming in."

"I'll go," said a sailor, detaching himself from the crowd, and turning back to the town.

They arrived at the mole. The night was starless, the wind had sunk, the sea was calm. They passed the little old mole, and directed their steps to the end of the new mole, which had been recently built, and stretched some little distance out to sea. Lights from the moored boats shone here and there in the darkness; the thick network of riggings was scarcely discernible, and the hulks looked like formless black masses.

The newcomers did not at first perceive another group of people at the end of the mole until they came upon them. They were all silent, with their eyes fixed on the sea, trying to make out the lines of the ship in the mist. The waves breaking monotonously against the rocks near by occasionally shimmered in the darkness.

"Where is she?" asked several of the comers from the theatre, as they cast their eyes around.

"There!"

"Where?"

"Don't you see a little green light there to the left? Follow my hand."

"Ah! Yes, now I see."

Don Rosendo went on to the second stage of the mole, and there ran against Don Melchor de las Cuevas. He was an old, very tall, wiry man; he wore his beard sailor fashion, that is to say, he let it hang round his neck like a bag. He had a stronger reason for doing this than the majority of the people of Sarrio who do so, for he belonged to the honored profession of the navy, although he was now on the retired list. But in

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seaport towns, and particularly when the place is small like that of which we are speaking, the maritime element preponderates, and so permeates the place that the inhabitants, unintentionally, and in spite of themselves, adopt certain sailor customs, words, and fashions.

The Señor de las Cuevas had been a gallant, fine fellow when he was young, and now at seventy-four he was still a vigorous, active man, with bright, penetrating eyes, aquiline nose, a fine, open countenance, and a bearing full of energy and decision.

He was standing on one of the seats fixed against the wall of the mole, with an enormous telescope turned towards the little green light which shone intermittently in the distance. He was by far the tallest figure in the group of spectators.

"Don Melchor, you here already! I have just sent a messenger to your house."

"I have been here for an hour," returned the Señor de las Cuevas, taking his glass from his eye. "I saw the ship from the observatory a little after sunset."

"Who would have thought it? How is it that nothing at sea escapes your observation?"

"I have better sight than when I was a lad of twenty," said Don Melchor in a loud, decided voice for all to hear.

"I believe it, I believe it, Don Melchor."

"I can see a little launch tack twenty miles off."

"I believe it, I believe it, Don Melchor."

"And if I were put to it," continued the old officer, in a louder tone, "I could count the masts of the frigates that pass the Ferrol."

"Draw it mild, Don Melchor," said a voice. There was a round of suppressed laughter in the dark, for Señor de las Cuevas inspired all the seafolk with profound respect.

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The old sailor turned his head angrily in the direction of the jeering remark, and after silently trying to pierce the gloom, he said in a severe tone :

“If I knew who that was who said that I would chuck him into the sea.”

Nobody dared say a word, nor was a sign of a smile seen, for it was well known in Sarrio that the Señor de las Ouevas was quite equal to fulfilling his threat.

He had served more than forty years in the navy, and had won the reputation of being a brave, punctilious officer ; but his severity bordered on cruelty. When no commander of a ship exercised the old maritime laws, Don Melchor still strove to keep them in practice. It was told with horror in the town that a sailor was drowned through his making him pass three times under the keel according to the old punishment for certain transgressions ; and more than a hundred men had been crippled by his blows, or had had the skin taken off their backs by his use of the rope.

However, there was no pilot or sailor who could be compared with him in his knowledge of all pertaining to the sea, the weather, ships, and all the secrets of navigation.

The little green light continued its slow approach until the form of the “Bella Paula” was visible to the naked eye, and, moreover, two or three black spots could be seen hovering around her from different sides. They were the pilot’s launch and the auxiliary boats, ready to tow the ship when necessary. Sail was crowded on the ship, as there was scarcely any wind. However, it was too near the breakwater not to be dangerous. At least Don Melchor thought so, for he began to swear under his breath, and to seem uneasy. At last, no longer able to restrain himself, although he knew he was not within earshot, he cried out :

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"Furl the maintopsail, Domingo! What are you waiting for?"

He had scarcely uttered these words when the almost imperceptible forms of the sailors were seen on the mastheads.

"We shall be all right now," exclaimed Don Melchor.

"Don Domingo would snap his finger at you," murmured the sailor who had incurred the old officer's wrath, under his breath.

The hulk of the ship, painted black, with a line of white on the upper decks, now stood out clearly from the dark background.

The eyes of the spectators, grown accustomed to the gloom, could discern perfectly all that was passing on board.

Two figures were on the bridge, the captain and the coasting pilot, and at the prow stood the ship-pilot.

"And the gaff-sail?" shouted Don Melchor again.

The sail of the mizzen-mast fell, as if in obedience to his voice. The wind was insufficient to fill the lower sails, and the canvas hung from the mast, limp and dilapidated as a draggled ball-dress. Soon all sails were furled and the ship was motionless until it slowly made way when taken in tow by the two boats. The figures of the rowers moved measuredly on the benches and the voices of the coxswains singing out, "Pull ahead! pull ahead!" broke the silence of the night.

But the rowers were so feeble in comparison to the bulk in tow, that the ship made but slow way. When at the end of a quarter of an hour she managed to get some thirty lengths off the head of the mole, a rope was thrown from one of the boats on to the sea wall to help tack the ship.

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"Captain, captain!" cried a stentorian voice from the crowd.

"What is it?" they replied from the ship.

"Is the Señorita de las Cuevas on board?"

"Yes."

"Then as long as the Señorita de las Cuevas is all right, all the rest may go to the devil."

The joke provoked much merriment in the crowd, until silence again reigned.

The ship now began to tack, being dragged ashore by the rope, which creaked with the tension of the hold; the people on the mole began talking with those on board, but they were silent and taciturn, being more concerned with the management of the ship than the questions directed to them. Then came a fresh ebullition of the jocose spirit of the sailors of the place, and fun was poked at those on board, more especially at a certain fellow who looked like a heap of skins, and whom they nicknamed Bruin, as he moved from one side to another with the awkwardness of a bear, handling the ropes and casting grunts of scorn at the crowd.

"I say, Bruin, you will be glad to have a dish of fish, eh?"

"Rejoice, O Bruin, for there is cider in Llandone's cellar."

"Is it hot in Norway?"

"Too hot for a rogue like you," growled Bruin, as he furled a sail.

This remark was received by the sailors with shouts of laughter.

"Keep clear," called the pilot from the bridge.

"Hold there, on board!" returned the sailor who held the slack end of the rope.

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The rope fell into the sea and dashed against the side of the ship. She was now close to the break-water. The tide was not high enough to anchor by the old mole. The captain called out to the pilot :

"Sound."

The pilot said to the sailor at his side :

"Drop anchor."

The anchor fell into the sea with a strident sound of chains. Then the windlass was heard at work.

"Are you going to moor the ship, Domingo?" asked Don Melchor.

"Yes, señor," returned the captain.

"It is not necessary ; you can cast anchor with two anchors. In an hour you will be able to get in."

"One way is as good as another for me," said the officer in a low voice, shrugging his shoulders, and then, in a loud tone, he added :

"Drop a second anchor," whereupon a second anchor fell into the sea with the same harsh sound as the first.

"How are you, uncle?" cried a clear boyish voice from the ship.

"Hello, Gonzalito ! arrived all right, my boy?"

"Perfectly ; here I come."

And with great agility the young fellow swung himself down by a rope into the boat.

"Let us go and meet him," said Don Rosendo, taking a step or two forward.

But Señor de las Cuevas caught the merchant by the arm and held him like a vise.

"Where are you going?"

"What is it?" asked the cod-merchant, in alarm.

"Ah ! it is true I did not recollect that this was the lower stage, the darkness—such a long time here, the dizziness from keeping one's eyes on the ship. My

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God ! what would have become of me if you had not caught hold of me ?”

“ Nothing, you would only have been stunned on the stones below.”

“ Holy Virgin !” exclaimed Don Rosendo, turning dreadfully pale, whilst a cold sweat bathed his brow, and his legs trembled.

“ Don’t be alarmed at what is past and gone, but let us go down and meet Gonzalito !”

So they went to the end of the mole, where a manly, tall, red-haired, fine young fellow had just arrived, dressed in a cloak which nearly reached down to his heels.

“ Uncle !”

“ Gonzalo !”

The two tall men then fell into each other’s arms, and Don Rosendo also received the young man with effusion. But he was so taken up with the narrow escape he had just had of losing his life, that he soon relapsed into his gloomy and melancholy mood, and he could hardly reply to the dock-yard master’s questions as to the disposition of the captain’s cargo.

They then started off to Don Melchor’s house, which was situated in the highest part of the town, commanding an extensive view of the sea. During the walk Gonzalo left his uncle to go on in front, while he diffidently asked Don Rosendo a few questions about his family.

“ How is Doña Paula ? Is she as smiling as ever ? And Pablo ? Is he still as fond of horses ? And Venturita ? I suppose she has grown a big girl now ?” Pause. “ And Cecilia, is she well ?” he finally asked abruptly.

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But the Señor de Belinchon only gave monosyllabic answers to all these questions.

“Do you know, Gonzalo,” he said, stopping suddenly, “that I nearly killed myself just now?”

“How?”

He then gave a full account of the incident of the mole, and when the story was ended, he again relapsed into a state of profound melancholy.

“I suppose the family is in bed,” said Gonzalo, after he had sufficiently sympathized (at least in his own opinion) with the late peril of the merchant.

“No, they are at the theatre—one never knows what may happen, eh?”

“So you’ve got a theatrical company here, eh?”

“Yes, for some days past. Do you know I thought I should have been killed, Gonzalo?”

“Tush! You might, perhaps, have broken a leg, or at the worst, a rib or two.”

“Well, that would have been bad enough!” exclaimed the Señor de Belinchon, with a sigh.

By this time they had proceeded some distance into the town, and arriving at a certain street, Don Rosendo took leave of the uncle and nephew. He held out his hand in a sad way, saying:

“I must go and fetch my family from the theatre. *À demain*, and a good night’s rest to you, Gonzalo.”

“*À demain*—kind regards to all.”

Then the Señor de las Cuevas and his nephew went on together to their house; and the traveller had to undergo a torrent of questions not relative to his visit to England, but concerning particulars of the voyage home.

“What wind did you have? Pretty blustering, eh? I suppose it hardly sank once? The ship didn’t pitch

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much, eh ? She was well loaded. You never sailed with all that canvas, eh ? You had to reef on leaving Liverpool, eh ? I know the course well."

Gonzalo replied to the questions in an absent-minded manner, for he really hardly took them in, as he was walking along in a state of abstraction, with his head down.

"What is the matter, Gonzalito ? You seem low-spirited."

"I ? Bah ! no, señor."

"I know you are."

They proceeded some distance in silence, and Don Melchor, striking his forehead, exclaimed :

"I know what it is !"

"What ?"

"You are longing for the sea again. I have gone through just the same. I used to leap ashore after any voyage, and then I was seized with a fit of depression and a strong desire to return to the ship ! This lasted two or three days, until I got accustomed to it. The fact is, I longed to get into port, but once there, I wished to be on board again. I don't know what there is so attractive in the sea, eh ? That air so pure ! The motion ! The freedom ! I know you are longing to return to the ship, eh ?" he concluded, with a mischievous smile, to show his perspicacity.

"Bother it all ! what I am longing for, uncle, is to go and see my fiancée."

Don Melchor was dumfounded.

"Is that true ?"

"Of course it is."

The Señor de la Cuevas reflected a minute, and then said :

"All right ; perhaps you would like to go and meet

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her at the theatre ? In the meanwhile I will go and see if Domingo has improved."

"How can he improve ? He is a first-rate fellow," returned the youth, smiling.

The uncle, oblivious of the irony, looked at him with scorn.

"Get along ! I see you return as silly as you went. I will wait supper for you."

"Don't wait for me, uncle," replied Gonzalo, already some distance off. "Perhaps I shall not want supper."

Then, without running, but with extraordinary swiftness, thanks to his unusually long legs, he strode through the streets, lighted here and there by oil lamps, in the direction of the theatre. Any one meeting him just then, would have taken him for one of the many Englishmen who occasionally come to Sarrio on shipping business, to reconnoitre mining districts, or to start some industry. His colossal height and his stout, robust appearance are not characteristic features of the Spanish race, although one comes across them in the north ; then that long coat, those double-soled boots, and strange-shaped hat denoted the foreigner. A glance at the face completed the illusion, for it was fair ; and the long red beard, and blue, or, more properly called, azure eyes are almost always seen in the northern races. Let us use the few minutes before his arrival at the theatre to give a short biographical sketch of this young fellow.

The family of Las Cuevas, to which he belonged, had from time immemorial been huge in stature, and seafaring by profession. His father had been a sailor, his grandfather a sailor, his uncles sailors, and the sons of these uncles also sailors. Gonzalo when not eight years of age was left orphaned of both father and



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mother, and possessed of a considerable fortune, managed by his uncle and guardian, Don Melchor, in whose care he had been left by his father at his death. The old sailor greatly wished his ward to continue the uninterrupted course of the Cuevas with regard to a profession. To awaken in him a love of the sea, or to make him take a fancy to it, he bought him a beautiful sailing boat, in which they both took trips, or went on fishing expeditions. But the good man's plans could not prevail against his nephew's predisposition for the land. He cared for nothing to do with the sea, but the fish out of it, and that only when dressed and steaming on the table. However, he managed sometimes to enjoy himself with a kettle, cooking an impromptu meal in some out-of-the-way spot on the coast, seated on a rock whence bubbled beautiful fresh drinking water. At fourteen Gonzalo had grown into a fine young fellow in the second class of the private college of Sarrio, which sent him up to the Capital every year for the examination, where he generally won the qualification "*good*," and once and again, but very rarely, that of "*highly commended*."

He was much liked by his school-fellows for his open, frank disposition, whilst he was respected for his power of dealing powerful blows. The gentle-folk of the town made much of him on account of his position and the family to which he belonged, and the sailors and other people of the place loved him for his frank, equable nature.

After graduating as bachelor of arts, he remained three years in Sarrio without doing anything. He got up late, and spent the greater part of the day at the casino playing billiards, in which game he became an expert. In spite of being the spoilt child of the place,

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he visited at few houses, preferring the stupid, demoralizing life of the café, to which he had become accustomed. Nevertheless, as he was not wanting in intelligence, and being of a naturally active turn of mind, he sometimes turned his attention to the study of some branch of science. He liked mineralogy, and many afternoons he left the casino and the billiards to repair to the suburbs of the town, in search of minerals and fossils, until he had quite a valuable collection. Then he took up the microscope for a time, and after sending for a costly one from Germany, he devoted himself to the examination of diatomaceæ, and he arranged them admirably well upon the little crystals which he cut himself. Finally, a book upon brewing having fallen into his hands, he devoted himself enthusiastically to its study. He ordered several works on the subject from England, and began to think that this unpractised industry might be started with advantage in Sarrio. He seriously thought of opening a brewery, but confiding the project to his uncle, the old man was furious, and gave vent to a series of inarticulate grunts, all beyond the normal diapason, which ended with the exclamation :

"What! a Cuevas start a brewery! The son of a captain, the nephew of a rear-admiral! Impossible! You are off your head, Gonzalo. It is well said that idleness is the mother of every vice. If you had passed through the naval college, as I advised you, you would have been first-lieutenant by now, and would not be running about with such mad ideas."

Gonzalo was silent, but he did not cease reading his treatises on the industry. He soon saw that, without visiting the chief breweries, and without studying the subject seriously, he could never attain any real knowl-



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edge of it, and so he determined to go to England and learn the business of a civil engineer. When he ventured to broach the subject to his uncle, the sailor did not object to the word engineer, but the attributive adjunct of civil aroused the same storm of invectives as the brewery had called forth.

“Civil, civil! nowadays everything shady is called civil. Be a straightforward engineer of roads, and ports or mines.”

At this time he knew, or, to speak more correctly, for everybody knows each other in Sarrio, he became acquainted with the *Señorita de Belinchon*. One day his uncle sent him to the rich merchant's house to ask him if he could give him a bill of exchange on Manila. Don Rosendo was not in his office, which was on the ground floor of the house, but as the business was urgent, Gonzalo decided to go upstairs. The maid who opened the door was very alert.

“Come this way, Don Gonzalo; the *Señorita Cecilia* will tell you where the master is.”

He was taken into an untidy room, with heaps of clothes upon the floor and on the table, at which the eldest daughter of the Belinchons was ironing a shirt, in a costume not befitting her station, for it was a scanty, narrow skirt, an apron tied round her waist like a workwoman, and her feet in shabby slippers. She did not blush at the young man finding her in such an attire and engaged in such a menial occupation, nor did she exclaim, as many girls would have done in her place:

“Goodness, what a state you find me in!” putting her hands to her hair and her throat.

Nothing of the sort; she suspended her task for a minute, smiled sweetly, and waited to hear what the youth had to say.

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"Good evening," he said with a blush.

"Good evening, Gonzalo," she returned.

"Can I see your papa?"

"I do not know if he is at home; I will go and see," replied the girl, leaving the ironing upon the table, and passing in front of him.

When she had proceeded a few steps she turned back and said :

"Is your uncle well?"

"Yes, sefiora, yes—I mean no, for some days he has not left his bed—he has a dreadful cold."

"It is nothing serious?"

"I think not, sefiora."

The girl went on her way smiling ; she was pleased at Gonzalo calling her sefiora, for she was not sixteen, and he spoke as if she were over twenty. They knew each other like brother and sister, but they had never hitherto behaved like grown-up people. They met every day in the street, at the promenade, at the theatre, or at church. When they were quite little, Cecilia recollected that one afternoon at the Elorrio Fair, when dancing the giraldilla with some other little girls of her own age, some rough boys began teasing them, pulling their hair, pushing them about, and running in the way so as to spoil their dance, and upset them. Gonzalo, then a boy of thirteen, seeing this rude conduct, ran to the little girls' assistance ; and with a kick here, a push there, and a few blows all round, he soon dispersed the rude boys. The eyes of the little dancers gazed at him in admiration, and an undying feeling of gratitude towards the heroic lad filled those tender hearts of five to ten years old.

Another time, years afterwards, on St. John's Day, Gonzalo lent his boat to her and her family, for a little

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sea trip, as all the boats and launches were full on that occasion.

But neither of these circumstances had constituted much intercourse between the young people. If they met face to face, Gonzalo would raise his hand to his hat ; if not, they would pass as if they did not see each other, in spite of the acquaintance, if not intimate friendship, existing between his uncle and Señor Belinchon. For the Bohemian life of the café, his rare association with girls, had made Gonzalo a shy, retiring youth.

"Come this way, Gonzalo; papa is waiting for you in the dining-room," said the girl, when she reappeared. "I hope your uncle will get better."

"Many thanks," he returned abruptly, and being so tall, he knocked against the lamp hanging in the hall so that it nearly fell to the ground.

He cast an agonized look at it, and quickly steadied it, whilst his face grew red with confusion.

"Has it hurt you ?" asked Cecilia, anxiously.

"No, indeed, señora—on the contrary, dear me ! I nearly broke it."

And he became more and more confused.

Our young friend was at that time of life when he would fall in love with a broom. He was rather late in reaching this susceptible stage, as is often the case when the physical organism overbalances the nervous. Therefore, Señorita de Belinchon, with no claim to prettiness, suddenly aroused a sort of feeling in him easily mistaken for love, and the result of that short interview was that Gonzalo henceforth went out of his way to pass the house of the De Belinchons, with his longing eyes fixed on the windows for a chance glimpse of the young lady ; he went on Sunday to eight o'clock

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mass at St. Andrew's Church, because Doña Paula and her family went there; at the theatre he ventured to cast many a glance in her direction, and he occasionally dared to raise his hat to her, but when he did so, he blushed violently and cast furtive looks around, trembling lest he should have betrayed the nascent feeling of his heart.

Innocent Gonzalo! Long before he was aware himself of his state of mind the whole town knew of it. Nothing could be hidden, especially anything to do with a young man and woman, from the sharp eyes of the gossips of a place so small as Sarrio. And not only did they know what was going on, but they made up their minds that the marriage was certain to come off sooner or later. Nevertheless, months went by and the matter did not advance one step. However, Gonzalo continued to give the same signs of his fancy for the girl, and he spent a long time every day after dinner in walking up and down in front of the rich merchant's house on his way to the casino. Cecilia would be at the window sewing; he would raise his hat and then go to the billiard table, and so on the next day. Don Melchor sent him twice on messages to Don Rosendo, but he always had the good luck to find him in his office. We say good luck because Gonzalo trembled at the idea of going upstairs and meeting Cecilia.

He was now twenty years of age. The idea of qualifying himself as a civil engineer and taking up some occupation occasionally crossed his mind in this idle life. A friend at this time returning from a military academy, a conversation with an English engineer, the tone of contempt in which those who have no occupation were spoken of in the casino, suddenly awoke in him a desire for work. At last he told his uncle that,

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with his permission, he would go to England to study something and see the world.

As Don Melchor could make no objection to this just and laudable suggestion, Gonzalo a few days later appeared at several houses of relations and friends, where he had not set foot for years, to take his leave of them, and on a beautiful, balmy spring afternoon he embarked with great pomp on the big "Vigia" for England.

Did he recollect Cecilia? We do not know. Temperaments like those of our friend are a long time falling a prey to passion—great havoc as it may make in the end.

Three years went by. He finished his course as an engineer, which is brief and practical in England, and then made up his mind to visit the factories of England, Spain, and Germany. During the time of his studies the recollection of Cecilia occasionally occurred to him without arousing any very deep feeling. But in the spring, when the blood circulates more freely in the veins, and Mother Nature gives her lesson in the verdure of the fields, the vivid colors of the flowers, the effects of sunshine, the soft, balmy air, and above all in her more faithful interpreters, the birds, Gonzalo's thoughts turned to matrimony. And whenever the idea crossed his mind, it was accompanied by the image of the eldest daughter of the De Belinchons.

"This way, Gonzalo; papa is waiting for you. Have you hurt yourself?"

The words still rang in his ears, and the recollection of the kind tone in which they were said filled his young heart with a feeling of love. The girl was not beautiful, but her eyes were, and her modest, pleasant

The "Bella Paula"

manner and the tone of her voice were all full of the charm so attractive in her sex.

"I should not mind marrying her," he said with a sigh to himself, as he thought how impossible it would be for him to breathe a word of love in her ears, or in those of any girl.

One day, when writing to a great friend in Sarrio, he suddenly thought of asking if Cecilia Belinchon were married. In reply, he learned that she was still single, and that, although young men frequented the house, probably more attracted by De Belinchon's money than his daughter's charms, it was not known that she had so far listened to any one of them.

On reading this letter the blood mounted to the cheek of the civil engineer, and he was foolish enough to think (will the reader think him very conceited?) that if Cecilia turned the cold shoulder on her admirers it was, perhaps, because she was prepossessed in his favor. Then he formed the plan of declaring his feelings in a letter, for he thought it would be less awkward to do it thus whilst far away.

Nevertheless, he hesitated, and when he took the pen in his hand to write the first line he dropped it at the thought of the surprise of the girl on the receipt of the letter. Some days elapsed. He could not get rid of the idea. At last, by dint of much subtle reasoning, he determined to write the letter. If she laughed at him, what of it? He would not be there to see, for in that case he would stay away from Sarrio; and if perchance he ever returned, he would manage to keep clear of her.

So at last the letter was written, but terrified at the idea of posting it, he kept it in his writing-case for some days. A few glasses of spirits were required to

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give him courage to post it, and when slightly elevated by the potation he took the letter from his writing-case, rushed into the street and dropped it into the first letter-box he came across.

“My God! What have I done?”

The effects of the libation had suddenly vanished, and he colored up to the roots of his hair, as if the mocking eyes of all the people of Sarrio were gazing at him through the gaping mouth of the letter-box.

He put his fingers into the aperture, in the vain attempt to withdraw the ill-fated epistle, but a shark could not have swallowed it more effectually, and the mouth of the box looked gaping and ready for more. For one moment he thought of going to the post-office to reclaim it, but the thought of the particulars which would have to be given so alarmed him that he preferred leaving the matter to fate rather than undergo such an ordeal.

Eight days of trembling suspense went by. By the time he could expect an answer his anxiety was overwhelming, and he even began to think he might see his own bold, ugly handwriting returned to him in an envelope.

A week, and then a fortnight, elapsed, but still no answer came.

He calmed himself with the vague hope of the non-arrival of his letter at its destination; then he fancied that Cecilia might have torn it up, without mentioning it to anybody. But, lo and behold, when he had given up all hope, he found on his plate, at breakfast-time, a letter from Spain, in an unknown lady's writing. His excitement at the sight was indescribable. He turned as white as the mantelpiece—his heart seemed to jump into his mouth. He opened the envelope with a trembling hand.

The "Bella Paula"

"Ah-a-a!" he sighed, with relief, after devouring the contents in two seconds. He then put his hand to his side, wiped the sweat from his brow with his pocket-handkerchief, took up the letter again, and re-read it quietly.

It was really from Cecilia; it was slightly ironical in tone—however, it was not a rebuff.

What fancy could have seized him for her after four years' absence? Her parents—who had opened the letter before she did—were equally surprised, and thought it was a rash act, peculiar to youth—a passing idea, of which he had probably already repented. She quite coincided with their opinion, although she had consented to follow their advice of writing to him, as they had always maintained friendly relations with his family. This letter filled him with delight; it was not the scornful refusal he had expected. Then he grew sad, and then cheerful, as he read and re-read the letter in search of a clear meaning. Was it kind—or was it unkind? He hastened to reply, imploring forgiveness for his boldness, and confirming his previous declaration with renewed and more vehement protestations.

The girl wrote again in a few days, in a kinder and more affectionate manner, and then Gonzalo sent another letter. An interchange of photographs followed, and sometimes Doña Paula enclosed a few lines in the letters sent by her daughter.

In time the young people were formally engaged, and the marriage was arranged.

Don Melchor corresponded with his nephew on the subject, and he called upon Don Rosendo. It was at last settled that Gonzalo should return in the spring, when the wedding was to take place.

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CHAPTER III

THE ENGAGED COUPLE PLAN THE HOME

THE rest of the audience was leaving the theatre, and as Gonzalo met the people pouring from the door, many of them recognized him, and he was soon surrounded by old friends who were all warm in their welcome.

The first to throw his arms around his neck was Don Mateo; then came Don Pedro Miranda; then the *alcalde*, Don Roque; then Don Victoriano and his wife Doña Rosario, and their three daughters.

Thus a circle soon gathered round the young man, who responded effusively to the greetings, embraces, and hand-pressures which reached him from all sides.

The sailors and women of the place also joined the señores in this demonstration of affection, and nothing was heard but exclamations of delight and admiration.

"How stout you have grown, Gonzalito!"

"You are a fine young man!"

"Why don't you grow like that, Periquito?"

"Don Gonzalo, you are a head taller than all the other fellows of Sarrio!"

"Grow! He has not grown; he has doubled his height. Come here, Grenadier, and embrace me directly."

A ship-master declared that the youth was as like the Prince of Wales as two drops of water, although Gonzalo might be taller.

The tall figure of the youth certainly towered above the group, and he reached his hand over the heads of

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those about him to the friends who could not get close to him, and his fine, open countenance beamed on all.

Don Mateo, on tiptoe, pulled him by the arm so that he bent down, and then he whispered in his ear :

“What a performance you have lost, Gonzalo ! It is a pity you did not arrive in the afternoon. The soprano sings like an angel ! And the dancing ! The dancing ! I tell you, boy, they don’t have better in Bilbao or Corunna. But never mind, I will have the performance again before the company leaves—or it won’t say much for my influence.”

But Gonzalo paid little heed to these words. With his eyes fixed on the door, he was waiting in breathless expectation for the appearance of the De Belinchon family, which, as one of the first and most patrician of the place, always waited behind to avoid mixing with the plebeians. At last, by the light of the lamp burning under the archway of the entrance, he caught sight of the face of Doña Paula, followed by that of Cecilia, and he tremulously advanced to greet them.

The girl turned as red as a poppy. This was natural, but for the mother to do so also was less natural. What was he to her ? Why was she to blush as much as the daughter ? and it was what she did to perfection. The voices of all three trembled, and after inquiring after each other’s health, their tongues seemed tied. The looks of curiosity from the people added to their embarrassment. Fortunately, Pablito now approached with Venturita, and our young friend greeted the former affectionately and gave a ceremonious bow to the latter.

Pablo smiled.

“Don’t you know her ? She is my sister, Venturita.”

“Oh ! How could I know her ? She is a woman. How do you do, Ventura ?”



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The girl gave him her hand with a mocking, roguish expression that quite confused him.

They then all turned towards home. Venturita ran in front, dragging her brother with her. Doña Paula, Cecilia, and Gonzalo walked behind. Don Rosendo closed the procession with his old friend Don Pedro Miranda. The streets were dark, for it was only at the corners that there were lamps.

The distance between the three groups of people gradually increased.

Gonzalo made desperate efforts to sustain conversation with his bride-elect and future mother-in-law ; but the girl never opened her lips, and Doña Paula was very far from being a Madame de Staël, and as the young man had never consulted the manual of conversation, he could not be called brilliant. In their letters they had arrived at the confidential stage. Doña Paula had put postscripts into Cecilia's epistles, to which Gonzalo had replied with little jokes ; he had sent stamps and caricatures for Ventura, and in every way had comported himself as a member of the family. But now the three were quite embarrassed, for our young friend had never before spoken to the Señora de Belinchon, and to Cecilia he had only addressed the words that we have recorded.

But there in front was Venturita, laughing with her brother ; and the engaged couple were quite certain that the merriment was at their expense. Nevertheless, by the time they reached the house they were more at home with each other, and there were signs of increasing friendliness between them. The party collected together on reaching the door of the De Belinchons' abode, which was situated in the Rua Nueva, the best street in Sarrio, and, like all the houses in that quarter, it was large and handsome.

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As Gonzalo had not yet supped, Don Rosendo asked him to join them at their evening meal ; and the invitation was given so cordially, that the young man, who wished for nothing better, willingly accepted it.

Señor Miranda and his son then took leave, and the Belinchon family, with the new-comer who was soon to be one of them, entered the house.

In the anteroom the ladies took off their cloaks and hats.

The light seemed to make the affianced pair shy. Gonzalo was now well able to see his betrothed, who was not improved by years. She was taller, but also thinner—love affairs don't make girls grow plump ; her nose seemed a trifle sharper ; but her beautiful eyes, so soft and intelligent, still shone like two stars.

He was greatly struck with the change in Venturita, the child he had seen skipping to school on the arm of a school-fellow.

She was now a woman, a full-grown woman, not so much from her height as from the roundness and fullness of her figure, and a certain directness of look touched with a dash of coquetry.

They cast a rapid look at each other, as if they met for the first time ; and Gonzalo said in a low voice to Doña Paula :

“How Venturita has improved ! She is a beautiful girl.”

Low as it was, the girl overheard the remark ; she pouted disdainfully and went straight to the dining-room, without betraying the gratification his spontaneous admiration had given her.

The table was laid, a patriarchal provincial board, abundant and clean, without flowers or any of the elegant accessories which are now the fashion. All

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Gonzalo's shyness vanishing at the sight of the meal, he soon felt quite at home. A feeling of cheerfulness pervaded them all. They exchanged remarks and smiles; Gonzalo took Pablito by the arm and asked him after his horses; Doña Paula arranged the order of the places; Venturita, who was already seated, began eating olives and throwing the stones at her sister, with knowing winks, whilst Cecilia, her cheeks aflame, put her finger on her lip to call her to order. Don Rosendo had returned from putting on his jacket and smoking cap, as he could not eat supper without them. His wife now invited the visitor to take the chair next to Cecilia, but she had taken her seat at the other end of the table.

"What are you about? Why don't you come to your proper place?" asked Doña Paula in surprise, whereupon the girl, without replying, quietly rose and blushing took the chair next to her betrothed.

The classic dish of buttered eggs was already steaming on the table.

"Come, help Gonzalo—serve him first," said Doña Paula to her daughter, with the benign smile befitting a wife whose ideas were in accord with those given by Saint Paul in his celebrated epistle.

Cecilia hastened to obey, and filled the plate of her future husband. He always had an excellent appetite, fitting for his great size, but now, sharpened by the sea air and some hours' fasting, he was voracious. He ate everything that was put before him, without stopping a moment, and without leaving a morsel, and Cecilia, as we can suppose, was indefatigable in serving him.

Directly he began to eat Gonzalo lost his shyness, for the pressing necessity of satisfying his enormous

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appetite was all-absorbing. Cecilia, on the contrary, hardly touched her food. Seeing two little pieces of ham about the size of two filberts on her plate, the young man said :

"Who is that plate for—the parrot?"

"No; it is for me."

"And are you not afraid it will give you indigestion?"

It was the first joke that he had ventured to make with his bride-elect. She smilingly returned :

"I never eat more than that."

Dofia Paula whispered into Venturita's ear :

"Don't you think they are very stiff with each other?"

Venturita repeated the remark in an undertone to Pablo, and he passed it on to his father. All four began laughing and casting glances at the engaged couple, who looked confused, asking with their eyes the reason of the sudden merriment.

"Mama, do you want me to tell them what we are laughing at?"

"Tell them."

"Then, señores, we were thinking that you might be less stiff with each other."

The bride- and bridegroom-elect hung their heads and smiled.

The good spirits of the supper party now broke forth in laughter and jokes. Pablito asked his future brother-in-law questions about horse-racing, skating-rinks, and other more or less enthralling topics of the kind.

Only Cecilia was silent in the intensity of her happiness, shown in the brilliant scarlet of her cheeks, the heat of which she tried in vain to cool with the back of her hand.



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When she thought she was unobserved she cast long, loving looks at her fiancé, whose fine, insatiable appetite, the sign of life and energy, surprised and captivated her; and she gazed at him in adoring admiration as a splendid type of masculine strength.

But these long, ecstatic looks did not escape Venturita, who managed by signs to draw the attention of Pablo and her mother to them. Gonzalo acknowledged the attentions of his fiancée with a rapid "Many thanks" without looking at her, for fear of blushing. When he did look up to speak to Pablo, his eyes always encountered Venturita's, and her smiling, mocking glance somewhat disconcerted him.

At last they left the table and dispersed. Don Rosendo and Venturita disappeared, and Pablo, after chatting for a few minutes, followed their example.

Dofia Paula and the engaged couple remained alone in the dining-room, and all three sat on low chairs in a corner together. Soon nothing but soft whispers were audible, as if they were at the confessional. The three chairs were close together, and with their heads almost touching, they began an animated conversation.

Dofia Paula soon broached the all-important question.

"This is the twenty-eighth of April. There are only four months from now to the first of September," and here she cast a long, knowing glance at the couple.

If it had been possible for Cecilia to get redder, she would have done so.

Gonzalo's lips wreathed in a meaningless smile, and he lowered his eyes.

After looking at them for a minute, as if enjoying their confusion, Dofia Paula continued:

"It is necessary to think of the trousseau."

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"Mama, *por Dios!* It is early days," exclaimed the girl in dismay, whilst her heart leaped into her mouth.

"It is not so, Cecilia; you do not know the time the embroidresses take in such matters. Nieves took a month to embroider two petticoats for Doña Rosario's daughter—and Martina is slower than she."

"Nieves embroiders very well."

"There is no embroidress in the town to hold a candle to Martina. She has hands of gold."

"I prefer the embroideries of Nieves."

"Then, if you wish it, let her embroider your clothes, but I—" said Doña Paula, looking at her daughter in an offended, haughty sort of way.

"I don't say so," returned the girl in alarm; "I only say I like the work of Nieves better than Martina's."

The trousseau soon became the subject of conversation. It was discussed from every point of view, and with the gravity and the care it deserved.

To whom should they intrust the hemming of the linen sheets? To whom the common ones? Who should make the underlinen? Where should the mantles be bought, etc.? All these questions were discussed, weighed, and considered. Doña Paula gave her opinion; Cecilia affected to contradict, but in reality what did she care?

Her whole soul was so filled with the thought of her approaching marriage that her voice trembled with emotion, and she could hardly speak, whilst her eyes glowed with rapture, and shone like two fine stars on a soft summer night.

"How hot it is!" she exclaimed every now and then, putting her hands upon her flaming cheeks.

Gonzalo assented with an inane smile to what was said, and frequently changed the position of his long



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legs, which were cramped from the lowness of his chair.

When they had discussed the linen of the trousseau, they passed on to the dresses, and the conversation became more animated, and Cecilia saw her fiancé without looking at him, and the eyes of Doña Paula, as she gazed at them both, grew softer and softer; their breath mingled, and the shoulders of the future bride and bridegroom touched each other.

The soft whispers, the lowered light of the lamp, which scarcely reached them, the frequent contact with the arm of her beloved, all combined to fill Cecilia with overwhelming emotion. Quite overcome, she got up two or three times and kissed her mother warmly; when she did this the third time, Doña Paula saw what it betokened and, with a compassionate, smiling glance, said:

“Poor little thing! My poor little thing!”

Cecilia covered her eyes with her hands, and remained so for some time.

“What is the matter?” said Doña Paula at last.

“Nothing, nothing.”

But she kept her eyes covered.

“But what is the matter, my daughter?”

“Nothing,” she replied at last, taking her hands from her face, and she smiled, but her eyes were wet.

“I know, I know,” returned the mother.

“You want the salts; you feel faint.”

“No, I am not faint; I am quite well.”

The conversation was then renewed, and Doña Paula expressed her wish that Gonzalo should come and live with them. This he rather objected to at first, as he knew his uncle would not like it, nevertheless he ended by conceding to the entreaties of both ladies. It was

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so natural that they should not want to be separated ! You can both be quite independent ; I will take care of that. There is the large room, the blue one, you know, Cecilia ; it has a large alcove ; then you only want the study for Gonzalo. But I have thought of that. Just by the large room there is the wardrobe-room, that looks on to the courtyard ; it is nice and light. It is all in disorder now, but, with a little trouble, it could be turned into a very nice room. Would you like to see it, Gonzalo ?”

The young man replied that it was not necessary, that he believed all she said, and that he had as good as seen it ; but the lady insisted on it, and, taking a flat candlestick, she escorted him to the other end of the house.

“This is the room—large, is it not ? Two windows. The alcove is large enough for two beds, much less for one,” she added, with a glance at her daughter, who turned aside to shut a window.

“Let us go and see the wardrobe-room——”

And leaving the apartment, crossing a passage and turning round a corner, they entered another room full of cupboards and lumber.

“Don’t mind about the distance, for it is really next to the large room ; it only wants a door of communication to be made between.”

Gonzalo turned to his fiancée and said softly :

“Why does not mama *tutoyer* me as your papa does ? Ask her from me—I do not like to.”

Then Cecilia approached her mother’s ear and said in a soft voice, which trembled with shyness :

“Gonzalo would like you to *tutoyer* him.”

“What do you say, child ?” asked Doña Paula, putting her hand to her ear.

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Cecilia, with a great effort, raised her voice a little :

"Gonzalo says why do you not *tutoyer* him as papa does?"

"Ah—I am glad the suggestion comes from him, otherwise I should not have ventured. Very well, then, when a door is made here in the wall, you will be able to go from the large room into this one without crossing the passage—do you like the room? Is it large enough?"

"Too large; my business at the present moment does not require much space."

Cecilia looked anxious, as if something were on her mind. She opened her mouth several times as if about to speak, and then lacked courage. At last, after a long pause, she ventured to say :

"One thing is wanting, mama."

"What?"

The girl hesitated, as if to gain courage, and then, in a trembling voice, she said :

"There is no dressing-room for Gonzalo."

"That's true. I never thought of that. Where was my head? There is no room about here—wait a moment—wait. We might put the pantry downstairs, and then there would be that little room, which, nicely furnished, would perhaps do. The only thing is, it does not communicate with the other rooms; he will have to cross the passage."

"What does that matter?"

They then returned to the dining-room, and to the same seats in the corner. Presently Venturita came in, in a white peignoir, cut so as to show her alabaster throat and part of her beautiful neck; her hair hung loose over her shoulders, and her feet were shod with gorgeously embroidered Eastern slippers. She came

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to say "Good-night" before retiring to rest, and, approaching her mother, she gave her a kiss, making teasing faces at her sister the while, which Gonzalo could not see.

"Well, good-night," she said, giving Gonzalo her hand.

"Good-night," he returned, with an admiring glance and in a tone of admiration not unnoticed by the girl.

She was just going away when a coquettish feeling made her turn back at the door and say to Cecilia :

"Where did you put the shoehorn ? I had to come in with slippers, as I could not find it."

Then she took the opportunity of showing her pretty foot.

"But it is there in the table drawer."

"If you only knew how sleepy I am," she said, advancing a step, and putting her hand on the head of her sister—"Do you know what I ought to do for it?" she added, with a smile. Gonzalo looked at her attentively. She was really a perfect creature ; the more he looked at her, the more he admired her particular charms. Her skin was soft, and shining as silk ; her complexion pink and white ; her mouth like a budding rose ; her lips red and full enough to show two rows of even teeth ; her hair golden, silky, and abundant ; a drawing-room magazine would say that it fell over her shoulders like a cascade of sunbeams, or something to that effect.

Her only imperfection was her height. If she had taken after her mother in this respect, nobody could have found any fault with her excepting, perhaps, her friends.

Seeing she was an object of admiration, she went on



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walking about, turning herself round to be seen from all sides, posing in affected attitudes, asking impertinent questions of her sister, then laughing aimlessly and covering her with kisses, or pinching her unmercifully.

"Let me alone, Venturita ; how wild you are to-day !" exclaimed Cecilia, with her kind, frank smile, as she tried to get away from her.

"Go to bed !" said Doña Paula.

"I am going."

But instead of going, she embraced Cecilia again, and tickling her, she managed to whisper into her ear :

"How are you enjoying yourself, you rogue ? Don't make those large eyes at him, or you will frighten him. Good-bye, good-bye, señores," she said in a louder voice, "and leave something for to-morrow, eh ?"

"What a little silly !" cried Cecilia, blushing.

Doña Paula and Gonzalo smiled, and he said in a low voice :

"What lovely hair !"

Ventura overheard him, and shaking her locks, she said :

"It is false."

They all burst out laughing.

"Don't you believe it ?" she asked in a serious tone, and approaching nearer.

"Pull it, and you will see it will come off in your hand."

The young man did not dare to comply, and continued to smile.

"Pull, pull," she insisted, turning her back to him, and holding her hair before his face.

Gonzalo raised his hand to the hair, but he only ventured to touch it caressingly.

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"What! it has not come off! That is because it is well tied on."

And she ran out of the room.

The private conclave was prolonged for some time, and many more points of their future life were touched upon; and as Cecilia listened to her mother descanting upon what they should do when once they were married, she could hardly conceal the tremor of emotion that possessed her. She had taken her mother's hand, and she pressed it and caressed it in a nervous way; sometimes she raised it to her lips and kissed it passionately.

Dofia Paula looked at her with sympathy, and smiled kindly at the joy that filled her daughter's heart.

The clock in the dining-room struck half-past twelve.

"Oh, how late! What will Don Rosendo say?"

"He never goes to bed before this time," replied Cecilia.

"Yes; but you know he takes some time to lock up," returned Dofia Paula.

Cecilia was silent. Gonzalo shook hands with them warmly, promising to come the following day. Then he went to Señor Belinchon's study to take leave of him.

The mother and daughter went on talking in the same corner on the same theme, the former being the object of countless embraces and fervent kisses.

"These are not for me," said the lady, in a tone of mingled joy and sadness.

"Yes, mama; yes!" replied the girl, embracing her with still greater effusion.

In the meanwhile Don Rosendo was bringing the arduous and complicated task of locking the doors and windows to a successful termination.

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He was not contented with locks and iron bars, but, to insure the non-violation of the sanctuary of his dwelling during the night, the rich merchant was in the habit of gumming pieces of paper over all the locks. These he examined carefully in the morning, to be quite certain that nobody had tampered with them. Then he put various bottles and pots upon the doorstep, so that if thieves came they would fall over them.

At the Club

CHAPTER IV

HOW THE CHIEF RESIDENTS OF SARRIO USED TO MEET
AT THE CLUB, AND WHAT TOOK PLACE THERE

DON MELCHOR DE LAS CUEVAS rose from the table, lighted a cigar and, offering one to his nephew, said:

"Let us go and have coffee."

Gonzalez was about to put the cigar in his pocket, not having hitherto been permitted to smoke in his uncle's presence; but the old man touched his arm, saying:

"Light it, my boy, light it; you are not a younker now."

So the young fellow took out a match and began puffing at the Havana with enjoyment, and the men then left the house together, and proceeded slowly down the street with the air of *bien être* worn by powerful-looking men after a heavy meal. They were as silent and majestic as two magnificent cedars unruffled by a breeze. The women at work in their doorways looked after them with interest and admiration.

"Who's the young man with Don Melchor?"

"What! don't you know? 'Tis his nephew, Señor Gonzalo, who arrived last night in the 'Bella Paula.'"

"He is a fine, strapping fellow."

"Like his father, Don Martos, God rest his soul."

"And like his grandfather, Don Benito," added an old woman. "What a noble, fine-looking family they are!"

At the top of a street which commanded a view to the

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sea, Señor de las Cuevas stopped a minute to cast his eye over the waters.

"Fine weather at sea! a slight breeze coming up! Do you see them?" he added, with an expression of triumph after a minute.

"What?"

"The launches, man, the launches. Don't you see them?"

"I see nothing," returned Gonzalo, fixing his eyes on the horizon.

"You are just as you were; you see nothing but the soup in your plate," said the uncle, with a sarcastic smile.

The Café de la Marina was already full of people. The clatter of conversation and disputes, the clink of the glasses, the ring of the domino pieces on the marble table, made a deafening noise. The place was situated in the small square formed by the junction of the Rua Nueva with the harbor, and one side of the house looked on to the sea. Most of the captains and pilots who stopped at Sarrío on their cruises resorted thither, as did the majority of the residents, who, without being sailors, had a partiality for what was maritime.

The entrance of our friends was hailed with delight from different tables. Don Melchor was the most popular and the most highly respected *habitué* of the café.

He had to greet all the assembled company, and take Gonzalo up to each of them.

The jolly fellows were all delighted with the young man, and wrang his hand almost to dislocation, whilst they were eager and hearty in their offers of a glass of wine or maraschino; and when this was refused on the plea of taking coffee upstairs, a profound gloom overspread their countenances.

At the Club

As a matter of fact, Don Melchor was accustomed to have his coffee in the small saloon, which was a room on the first floor of the house, communicating with the café by an iron staircase, which the uncle and nephew finally ascended.

There the chief residents of the town were congregated, seated on a circular sofa, with little Japanese tables in front of them, on all of which coffee was served.

Through one of the doors, which was generally left open, could be seen the billiard room, where the same people always played, with the same onlookers. When Don Melchor and his nephew entered a project was in course of discussion for keeping the poor women who sell vegetables and milk from intemperance.

And Gonzalo recollected that on a certain occasion, when he came thither to see his uncle before going to England, the same matter was then under discussion. The themes varied little in that assembly. The town continued its tranquil even course in the midst of its daily work. The only events that occasionally shook it from its lethargy were the arrival or departure of some important ship, the death of a well-known person, a dishonored bill, the paving of some street, the tax on some merchandise, the lightening of contraband goods, or the bad state of the harbor.

The women and young people were too much taken up with their own affairs to trouble about outside matters. But the arrival of any handsome young stranger caused a great sensation among the marriageable girls; and if any young man walked for the first time with Margarita at the Promenade, it was looked upon as a settled affair; if Severino of the iron-mongery administered a beating to his wife, what could she expect after marrying such a drunken fellow? and the dress that a certain

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young girl wore on the Day of Our Lady made quite an excitement.

"You say it came from Madrid! What Madrid? Why, I saw it cut out at Martina's myself!"

The subscription dance announced at the Lyceum formed a great topic of discussion.

"I don't believe there will be a ball, the young men fight too shy of expense."

But the grave elders who frequented the Club despised these themes, albeit they sometimes condescended to touch upon them.

Gonzalo had seen Don Rosendo, Don Mateo, Don Pedro Miranda, and the *alcalde* the previous evening. But Gabino Maza, Don Feliciano Gomez, M. Delaunay, the French engineer, Alvaro Peña, Marin, Don Lorenzo, Don Agapito, and five or six other men whom he had not yet seen, were there, and they all rose to embrace the young man.

Don Pedro Miranda, whom we have already mentioned, was a man considerably past seventy, small and insignificant looking, with a smooth bald head, large solemn eyes, and of a retiring disposition.

He was the richest land-owner in the place, and no titled person in the town could have been a better representative of the aristocracy, in virtue of his own descent from an old family of land-owners.

To this distinction, however, he attached but small importance. He was an unpretentious, courteous man, who consorted with all his neighbors regardless of his superior rank; and he was always extremely particular not to allude to money, or to be in anywise dictatorial or antagonistic to anybody.

But if he entirely waived the respect due to his birth, he was very jealous of his rights as a land-owner.

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Never was there a proprietor more proprietary than Don Pedro Miranda.

The institutions of ancient as well as modern law, the universities, the army and navy, the political constitution, and religion itself had no other *raison d'être* in his eyes but that of contributing, directly or indirectly, to the preservation of his seignorial rights.

The marvellous macrocosm of the universe was designed for the support of his indisputable claim to the full possession of Praducos, a hamlet two miles from the town, and to his right of an annual fee of a hundred and fifty ducats in consideration of his title to the land at the mouth of the river.

This very clear sense of his rights engendered, from very excess of clearness, several disputes. A laborer would come to him and say :

"Señor, Joaquim the martin-breeder cut to-day some of the branches of your walnut-tree which hung over into his garden."

"But the walnut-tree was mine," exclaimed Don Pedro, crimson with rage and surprise.

"Yes, señor, but it hung over into his garden."

"What! The fellow dared to touch anything which is *mine—mine!*"

Thereupon a little lawsuit ensued, which, of course, he lost. He lost dozens of these lawsuits in the course of his life, without growing any wiser on the subject.

Don Roque de la Riva, the *alcalde* of Sarrio, whom we had the honor of comparing, when we first saw him at the theatre, to a courtier of the time of Louis XV., or a coachman of some great house, was not distinguished for clearness of speech, for it was so indistinct and confused that his interlocutors had great difficulty in understand-

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ing him. We do not know whether the mutilation of his words took place in his mouth, throat, or nose, but it is a fact that they almost came forth transformed into such mysterious, vague, chaotic utterances that they were completely unintelligible. More especially was it impossible to talk with him after dinner, and this for no other reason, according to report, than because Don Roque would insist on patronizing a wine called Rivero, so strong that nobody could touch it without fear of getting intoxicated.

This head of the corporation used to leave home every afternoon, apparently alone, but in reality with an escort. His enormous shaven face was very red, and the color was accentuated in his huge Roman nose; his eyes, blood-shot and half closed, as if unable to bear the weight of his eyelids, looked slowly into every corner of the street with an expression of physical *bien être*; his ponderous, slow, vacillating step showed the sympathetic state between his psychical and physical faculties. Don Roque only had to come across some official, sweeper, watchman, or stone-breaker of the municipality to make his enjoyment complete.

When from afar he espied one, his eyelids were quickly raised and his nostrils quivered like those of a tiger at approach of prey. Suppose the fellow, scenting the approach of the tiger, passed into another street or tried to hide himself! Don Roque shouted to him, with a voice of thunder :

“Juan, Juan, Juuaan!”

The victim heard and bowed his head.

“Have you taken the message to Don Lorenzo?”

“Yes, señor.”

“Have you told the secretary that he must let the matter of the cemetery stand over?”

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"Yes, señor."

"Have you taken the documents to the petty court of San Martin?"

"Yes, señor."

"Have you told Don Manuel that he must take away that rubbish in front of his house?"

In fact, he went on asking questions until the poor official came to a negative answer.

Then the loud voice of the *alcalde* was heard all down the street, and even to the end of the town; his eyes became more inflamed, and his apoplectic face grew quite alarming. It was impossible to understand what he said. His ejaculations alone would have made his discourse incomprehensible, but these were enunciated in such a chaotic fashion that the "h" alone was distinguishable.

The scolding never lasted less than fifteen or twenty minutes; he required no less time to let off the superfluous spleen which had accumulated since the previous afternoon. Just as there are people who put their fingers down their throats in the morning to make themselves ill, so Don Roque was not happy until he had had this ebullition of wrath. He had only one interjection in his vocabulary, but this he used in such abundance that quantity atoned for quality.

The neighbors came out of their doors to hear him, but with a smile on their faces, as if accustomed to such scenes.

"Don Roque is giving it hot to-day," said one to another in a loud voice.

"See how Juan is behaving." In fact, every time the *alcalde* turned his back the clerk put up his thumb and made a long nose at him.

Don Roque liked to come upon a road-sweeper or a

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stone-breaker at his work. For he would cautiously approach him from behind and, catching him by the collar, exclaim:

"Ah! so that's the way you sweep, is it!—ah! Do you think I pay you to leave half the dirt between the stones?—ah! Is this gratitude?—ah! It is shameful!—ah!"

Once the zeal for his office led him to seize the broom and give the man an object-lesson in the art of sweeping.

The townsfolk, the few passers-by in the street, and some young ladies whom the noise had brought to a window went into fits of laughter. The sweeper himself, in spite of his awkward position, could not help smiling at the energy with which the figure, with its coat-tails flying, made erratic and angry dashes at the ground.

"Is that the way you sweep?—ah!" (Terrible bang with the broom.) "That is the way—ah!" (another bang). "That is the way to sweep—ah!" (another bang). "That is the way to sweep!—ah!"

Until, wornout, heated, and nearly falling from fatigue, the *alcalde* handed back the broom, and took up his tasselled stick again.

Having thus relieved his noble heart of the superfluous ah's which weighted it, he resumed his way, and arrived at the Club in a very happy state of body and mind.

Gabino Maza was a man of about five-and-forty years of age, a naval officer who had retired some years ago from the service, his ungovernable temper being unable to brook professional discipline.

He had an olive complexion, and small bright eyes, with dark lines underneath which showed his bilious

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temperament. He was tall, wiry, and masculine, and his hair and beard were of a blue-black hue; his gestures were always nervous and violent; his voice was indefinable, sometimes quiet, but when he was at all agitated, which was almost always the case when he began to speak, it was loud and shrill, and of such a discordant falsetto that it was deafening.

With his little income, and a tiny pension, he was able to support his family in Sarrio with the comfort of a gentleman at ease, which in the capital of the province would have been impossible.

A born disputant, he brought into every question, trivial as it might be, an amount of passion and violence that was truly alarming, so anxious was he to contradict whatever was said, although it might be as clear as noon-day. He judged people in such a severe and pessimistic spirit that he never believed in the pure motive of a kind action, however noble and honorable it might seem; and his spite and malignity bordered on madness. Nevertheless, this man was not so much disliked by his neighbors as might have been expected. The intimacy of a village or little town gives greater scope for learning the true character of each individual than is possible in large places, where a merely superficial intercourse may permit many cold, selfish, bad-tempered men to disguise their true selves with a sympathetic veneer, and polite words, courteous manners, and an insinuating smile win the encomium, "nice, agreeable sort of a person." But in the country that all goes for naught, and, on the contrary, excessive amiability and very sweet smiles excite distrust. The character of everybody is as ruthlessly and as minutely examined as if it were a bundle of nerves under the dissector's knife; so that many people are hated who seemed at first attractive;

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and others liked who were at first sight considered aggressive, hard, and violent.

Dissimulation, so much practised in great towns, is never tolerated in the provinces, albeit it is the prevailing vice of all social relationships. Quick tempers and excitable natures do not arouse mistrust, as they are at least "clear and above-board." There is always a sense of justice in such people which, distorted and overbalanced by passion as it may be, does not make them disliked. Besides, as quick temper and excitability are a constant cause of self-suffering and discomfort, both physical and moral, it is justly considered that men of this temperament reap their own retribution.

Gabino Maza was neither disliked nor very much liked; those who were offended by him grumbled at him and kept him at a distance, terming him a malignant, sharp-tongued fellow; and the others laughed at his exaggerated style, and enjoyed a conversation with him without professing any great regard for him.

Another of the characters congregated there was Don Feliciano Gomez, a retail merchant in ultramarine goods, and also the owner of three or four vessels and several smacks which traded along the Biscayan coast, the largest sometimes going even as far as Seville. He was of middle height; his head, destitute of hair, was pyramidal in form; his waxed moustachios were turned up to his nose, and his voice was almost always hoarse. He was a cheerful, kind, optimistic sort of fellow; he was a confirmed bachelor, and lived with his three elder sisters, whom he had made real "señoras" by dint of his own hard work and economy. The reward they gave him, according to public report, was to keep him in hand like a child, admonish his slightest faults, and worry and torment him in every imaginable way. Nev-

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ertheless, he was never heard to utter a single word of complaint against them.

M. Delaunay, the Belgian engineer, arrived at Sarrio a few years before our story opens, with the object of managing a mining district of an imposing English company. The working was a failure, and the company deprived him of his post and his pay. But Delaunay, who was a born speculator, undertook seven or eight other commercial enterprises. First he started a manufactory of paper, then one of French nails, then he conceived the idea of cultivating oysters, then he tried a cheese factory, and ice factory; and finally he thought of turning to account some large, uncultivated tracts of land near Sarrio.

All the enterprises had failed without anybody knowing why. Delaunay was certainly intelligent, clear-headed, and industrious. He was complete master of every trade that he entered into; he ordered all the apparatus from England, set it up, and it worked well and produced very satisfactory results. He attributed his failures to the lack of means of transport. The last of his famous enterprises, which died before it came into practice, brought more discredit on him than any other. In one of his excursions in the environs of the town he noticed close to a little river some uncultivated land, which he thought could easily, with a little trouble, be cultivated; he computed its value, drew out a plan, and when, a few months later, he found himself compelled to close the ice factory and to dismiss the workmen, he recollected this low land and mentioned it to Don Rosendo Belinchon, Don Feliciano Gomez, and two West Indians, so that they might aid him in his grand scheme. They replied that it would be necessary to see the district, and an expedition was arranged. One morning they set off

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on horseback, and took the direction of the river Orleo, six miles from Sarrio. Arriving there, they left the horses and ascended the hill on foot, from whence they could see the marsh land.

What was Delaunay's shame and confusion, when he saw the tract that he intended to cultivate covered with maize, beautifully green and flourishing. In fact, it had been under cultivation for more than six years; and his mistake arose from having seen it in December, when it dies down.

The party returned to the town, and one can imagine what a joke was made of the incident.

He was ruined at last, and he found himself obliged to live in a wretched fashion.

But his rage for speculation increased instead of being dampened by failure, and this to such a degree that there was not a single capitalist in Sarrio whom he had not tried to inveigle into some of his enterprises.

At one time it was a road to the capital, another a port of refuge, or stone moles, and another time a grand hotel. Some West Indians, certainly only a few, fell victims to his persuasions, and paid for their innocence with the loss of some thousands of dollars.

However, Delaunay was a man of talent, and studious, and he was well informed in all the improvements of science, so to depreciate him would be injustice.

The harbor-master, Alvaro Peña, a young fellow of thirty years of age, dark, with large black eyes, and *moustachios à la Victor Emanuel*, was noted for his profound, implacable hatred against the ecclesiastical profession, and all who represented it, even to his own brother.

Without any taste for science or literature, he owned a rather extensive library, consisting exclusively of books

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against religion and its ministers. He was a contributor to two or three periodicals, known by their anti-clerical opinions; and it was said that he had been occupying himself for some years past collecting data for a book that he thought of publishing under the title "Religion, the Most Retrograde of Sciences," of which several of his acquaintances had been introduced to different portions. He was cheerful and straightforward, and partial to stories and jokes in which some priest or monk played the chief part.

Don Jaime Marin, the owner of four hundred acres of land which, with the tax, realized six thousand pesetas, would have been a great scoundrel, a fast, bad man, if he had not had Doña Brigida for a wife. This important lady managed, with laudable energy, to prevent her husband ruining the whole family, and being turned out of doors. Before he finished making ducks and drakes of the property she succeeded in depriving him judicially of its control, and having it made over to her. It is not easy to describe the firmness with which Doña Brigida took the reins of management. No Roman patrician was ever imbued with a greater sense of the *sui juris* of the sacred rights with which "the city" had invested her. From the time of this occurrence Don Jaime, who was then over fifty years of age, dropped into being a mere *thing* in her hands, according to the law's decree. In his character of *alieni juris* he had to submit to the direct and constant sway of his lord and master, and to bow in all ways to her universal will. Farewell to sumptuous suppers of shellfish and Rueda wine in the Café de la Marina! Farewell to hunting the hare with Fermo the butcher and Marcelino the engraver! Farewell to delightful nights of tresillo! Farewell to afternoons of peace and happiness on the

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lake of Sebastian de la Puente! Farewell! The obdurate lady put in his hand three pesetas every Sunday, neither more nor less. It was all the pocket money he had to spend on his pleasures for the week, with the exception of smoking, which she took in hand herself, buying the cigars and all. When he required a hat, she bought it for him; when he needed a suit of clothes, or a pair of boots, she told the tailor or shoemaker to call and measure him. She even prevented his going to the barber's for fear he should spend the two reals, and so the barber came on Saturdays to shave him. It sometimes happened that the barber came when Don Jaime was still asleep.

"What am I to do?" he inquired of Don Brigida.

"Shave him," returned the inexorable señora.

Obedient to the command, the barber approached the bedside, covered the face with soap and quietly shaved Don Jaime while still half asleep, and on his finally rousing himself, he said to the servant who brought him his chocolate:

"To-day is Saturday, let the barber be brought."

"You ass, you silly, that no priest can shrive," replied his sweet consort from her room, "don't you see you are shaved already."

"Ah, so I am," returned the good señor, feeling his face.

At first he asked his friends or acquaintances at the café for money with which to play tresillo, and he drank coffee on trust at the café. But the friends soon left off obliging him, and the master of the establishment declined to even trust him for a peseta, for Doña Brigida almost knocked him downstairs when he one day brought her a bill for a hundred and twenty reals.

So Don Jaime was reduced to spending hours in

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watching the game of tresillo and in giving advice to the players, which was not wanted. The winners sometimes rewarded him with a glass of rum.

He occasionally played draughts with Don Lorenzo, but as he declined to play "for love," Marin had to find something to play for which was not money. He finally decided to have for a stake one of the cigars that his wife gave him in the morning; when he lost it, he had to spend the evening without smoking; sometimes, trying to get his revenge, he lost two or three more, and so he had to hand them over to his opponent on the ensuing days. In the meanwhile he went from friend to friend begging a little tobacco to appease his insufferable longing for a smoke. Poor Marin!

Dofia Brigida could never succeed in making him retire to rest early. He had spent so many years in being up till four or five in the morning, that it was now impossible to break the habit. As, when he was kept at home, he never went to bed until dawn, and as he spent the night in wandering about the rooms, and the bad habit of being up at night by one's self is very inexpensive, the ingenious señora let him retire to rest at what hour he liked. He remained at the Café de la Marina with the latest habitués, and when these had gone he waited whilst the servants put away the china and glass, and the master was ready to shut up. When he was literally sent off from the establishment, he withdrew to the Rua Nueva, where he sat with his friend the watchman, and, chatting with him, passed the hours before dawn.

Don Lorenzo, Don Agapito, Don Pancho, Don Aquilino, Don German, and Don Justo were *Indians*. That is to say, they were people who had been sent as children to the West Indies by their parents to earn their living,

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and they had returned between fifty and sixty years of age with fortunes varying from thirty to a hundred thousand dollars. There were more than fifty of these Indians in Sarrio. The hard work and the long state of self-suppression in which they had lived made their ideas of happiness quite different to ours. We find pleasure in a constant change of amusement, in going about and travelling, and enjoying with both body and mind the beautiful variety of things of nature. But these West Indians looked for nothing more than exemption from the hard law imposed by God on Adam after his fall; and, in truth, they gave themselves up to this peculiar delight. The majority of them had their money invested in government funds, so they had their incomes without any trouble. They were early risers from force of habit, and they paraded the streets or the mole every morning in parties of six or eight. They watched the arrival and departure of boats, and the loading and unloading of cargoes. After dinner, they retired to the Café de la Marina, or to that of La Amistad, and spent three or four hours watching or joining in the game of billiards.

"Go, little ivory ball, go into that pocket! See, see, Don Pancho, it has cannoned." "Come out, my little dear, come out of that pocket." "Ah! ah! well played, Don Lorenzo!" "Did it not go well, Pancho?"

The game was always seasoned with these remarks, which went on *ad nauseam*.

When the days were long, these West Indians were seen in parties about the environs of the town, either walking, or seated on the grass on the banks of a stream. That was the hour of reminiscence, of the tropics.

"Do you recollect, Don Agapito, do you recollect that little dark creature who came to you for a place in the store?"

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"And how well she sang, the little rogue!"

"They said you were smitten with her, quite smitten, Don Agapito."

"How now, Don Pancho—why, she only went to the blacks' ball with the negro of my partner, Don Justo?"

"Get along, man, don't annoy me; the one who went to the ball was yourself; I saw you sportive enough with her in the country-dance."

There was no counting on this West Indian clique for subscriptions for the orchestra, theatre, or any public amusement. The young people of the town had to apply to the purses of their papas, for they knew it was useless to expect American money to be forthcoming, which roused such indignation among the young people that they called them stingy fellows, boors, and money-laden asses to their faces as well as behind their backs. But the Indians were thick-skinned, and treated such terms with contempt. The one who professed an open aversion to them (and for whom did he not entertain it?) was Gabino Maza.

Why should these fifty idlers spend their days dawdling about the streets? If they would only devote their money to some industry profitable to the place!

When Don Melchor de las Cuevas and his nephew entered the saloon, the only person standing and gesticulating in the middle of the place was this same Gabino Maza. He could not remain two minutes seated; the excitement of his nervous system, the vehemence with which he tried to convince his audience, obliged him to jump from his seat and dash into the centre of the room, where he shouted and gesticulated until he had exhausted his breath and his strength. He was talking of the theatrical company, which had announced its

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departure on account of having lost in the receipts of thirty performances.

Maza was trying to prove that there had not been such losses and it was all make-up.

"It is not true; it is not true. He who says he has lost a farthing, lies!" (Then lowering his voice and giving his hand to Gonzalo.) "How are you, Gonzalo? Yes, I know you arrived yesterday. You are all right. I am glad of it. I repeat, that he lies! Why, they don't dare to tell me so!"

"They have lost six thousand reals in the thirty performances, according to the account that the baritone has given me," said Don Mateo.

Maza ground his teeth. His indignation impeded his speech. At last he burst out:

"And you listen to that drunkard, Don Mateo? Get along! get along!" (With assumed disdain.) "By dint of consorting with comic players you have lost your head for business. You have got rusty."

"Listen to me, you blusterer. I did not say I believed him. I said that was what the baritone's calculations came to."

Maza leaped up, and returned to the centre of the room, tore his hat violently from his head with both hands, and waving it frantically, he vociferated:

"But, señor! but, señor! We seem to be made fools of here! Well, you tell me what has become of twenty thousand and more reals which the receipts came to, and almost as much again for admissions paid at the door?"

"The salaries have very much increased," said the harbor-master.

"You are not drunk, by Gad! Alvaro! You are not drunk—I will tell you in a minute what the salaries

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are" (counting on his fingers). "The tenor, six crowns; the treble, another six; that's twelve; the bass, four; that's sixteen; the contralto, three; that's nineteen; the baritone, four——"

"The baritone, five," interrupted Peña.

"The baritone, four," persisted Maza in a rage.

"I am certain it is five."

"The baritone, four!" roared Maza again.

Alvaro Peña now rose in his turn, fired with the noble desire of getting the better of his opponent, and then ensued a hot and furious dispute, which lasted about an hour, and all, or nearly all, the members of that gathering of celebrities joined in. Such a battle resembled the famous engagements that took place between the Greeks before the walls of Ilion; there was the same fury and heat, the same primitive simplicity in the arguments, and the same candid, rough violence in the invectives.

"You are an addle-headed man!"

"Hold your tongue; hold your tongue, you uncouth fellow!" "You are a bellowing ox!" "I tell you it is not true, and if you want it plainer, you lie!" "Goodness, what a goose! You are like a silly woman."

These altercations were very frequent, almost daily, incidents at the Club. As all those who took part in them had a straightforward, perfectly primitive way of dealing with questions, similar, not to say equal, to that adopted by the heroes of Homer, the argument started at the beginning of the dispute continued until the end. There was a man who would spend an hour incessantly saying: "One has no right to meddle with anybody's private life!" or "That may do in Germany, but not here in Spain!"

Then cries briefer, and more to the point, such as

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"windbags!" "windbags!" filled the air until the crier collapsed on the sofa with exhaustion.

But what the arguments lost in variety they gained in intensity, for they were expressed with great and forcible energy, and in tones raised to such a pitch that some of the voices became quite hoarse, which was generally the case with Alvaro Peña and Don Feliciano, who had the loudest voices, but the weakest throats. When the Corporation had the trees of the Promenade de Riego trimmed, it caused a commotion in the club; when the clerk of the House of Gonzalez and sons decamped with fourteen thousand reals, it caused another heated discussion; when the parish priest declined to give a certificate of good conduct to the pilot Velasco, Alvaro Peña burst a blood vessel in his excitement. But no bad feeling remained after these violent scenes were over, neither were the personal remarks recollected that the discussions gave rise to. How could it be otherwise, since there seemed to be a tacit understanding that none of the ungracious epithets were to be resented? The local character of the subjects was unique. Politics were little studied in Sarrio; it was only when the papers noticed some event of great importance that the inhabitants of the place took a passing interest in them.

Twenty years ago the rich banker, Rojas Salcedo, was elected representative of the place in parliament, and he paid one visit to Sarrio to make himself acquainted with the town. Nobody thought of disputing his election. The presidents and secretaries of the colleges generally met together, and computed from the Acts the number of votes that he was entitled to. The reason of this was that Sarrio had always been a commercial town, where everybody could gain a living without having recourse to government appointments.

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The majority of the young men, after having passed two or three years in some college in England or Belgium, took their places in their father's offices as their future successors; the others, the minority, followed some military or civil career with a fixed income, and only came occasionally to pass a few days with their families.

It must, in one word, be confessed that Sarrio was a sleepy place, dormant amid all the great manifestations of mind, amid all the regenerating lights of contemporary society; nobody studied the profound problems of politics, and the terrible controversies engaged in by the different parties in other places, to gain victory and power, left them utterly unmoved. In short, in the year of grace 1860, there was no public life in Sarrio. They ate, they slept, they worked, they danced, they played, they paid their taxes, but they were absolutely wanting in public spirit.

When that evening at the club the dispute had utterly worn them out and spoiled their digestions, Don Mateo, beaming with delight, announced to the company that he did not mind about the departure of the dramatic company, for he had for some days past been arranging a surprise for the Sarrienses; and after a great deal of trouble the matter was concluded.

He was in treaty with the celebrated Marabini, the phrenologist, the prestidigitator; probably Tuesday, yes, Tuesday or Wednesday, they would moreover be able to admire his wonderful skill at the theatre; he would, moreover, bring with him some dissolving views and a tame wolf.

Gonzalo meanwhile had left the billiard room and was looking at half a dozen West Indians playing at chapo. When they struck the ball all the gold seals that hung

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from their enormous gold chains rang like bells. These chains and these seals were the greatest inducement and the chief bait that the artisans of Sarrio used to persuade their sons to go to Cuba.

"Fool! and you could come back in a few years with a fine cloth coat, a well-got-up shirt-front, patent boots, and a watch-chain like Don Pancho's!"

This last inducement was too much for any lad.

"Will it go seven times round my neck, papa?"

"Yes, boy, yes; and you will have pencil-cases and seals hanging on to it."

And so with their heads full of the prize the poor fellows went off in the "Bella Paula," the "Carmen," the "Villa de Sarrio," or any other sailing vessel, to perish with yellow fever or hunger, lured to destruction by the glitter of the trumpery jewelry like the eyes of the terrible Lorelei.

The gestures of the Indians whilst at billiards being those of people unaccustomed to restrain and compose their feelings, were strange and funny, and a source of delight to the young men of the place, whose antipathy to the West Indians was always shown in making fun of them. Who tapped upon the floor whilst the balls were running like Don Benito? Who bent from one side to another, and twisted and contorted himself as if the destination of the ball depended upon his movements, like Don Lorenzo? And who could equal Don Pancho, who was little and fat, almost square, in his way of sinking in a heap on the sofa after having struck a ball, to better see the havoc he had made on the table? Occasionally one of them addressed a word of impatience to the fellow: "Get up, my boy; don't excite yourself!"

Don Feliciano Gomez took a seat by Gonzalo, who soon wearied of his good-tempered, superficial conver-

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sation, which was accompanied by an affectionate poke in the ribs at every instant.

"When is the great day to be, Gonzalin? Soon, eh? You know I am longing to see you with your young lady on your arm, going to high mass! All right, my dear; all right; go and be happy. At home, the girls [it was thus he always termed his old sisters] don't leave me a moment's peace; since yesterday it is: 'When is Gonzalin going to be married? Don't forget to ask him!' Well, the poor things have known you ever since you were born. There is nothing like matrimony for a peaceful, contented life. You will say, 'That being so, why have you not married yourself, Don Feliciano?' Listen, my boy, why should I marry, when I can live happy as a bachelor? What do I want? I have a home, with two dear girls who take the utmost care of me, whom I adore—" (Poor fellow! report in the place gave quite another version.) "And so I have nothing to complain of—is it not so, my boy? Certainly, when I was young I had other ideas, but, as years go by, one ceases to think of them. Look here, if any one said to me now: 'Feliciano, would you like to go back twenty years?' Bah! let another dog have that bone. The best age for a man is fifty. Don't you doubt it, Gonzalin. It is then that one can eat and sleep in peace. Is there a young woman that is worth a dish of sardines freshly fried?

"But they have to be fried just before they are eaten; if fried during the soup, they are not worth a brass farthing. Or a lobster with fresh draught cider? Doesn't it make your mouth water, my boy? And now you are going to be married, and there will be kissing and 'my darling' here and 'my love' there—is it not so? Well, well, as things go it is a good thing. The

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girl is of good family. Don Rosendo is rich—you are doing well, doing well, my boy. But I say, why don't you marry the little one, Venturita, who is pretty? I don't say that the elder one is ugly, but there is no doubt that the younger one is more attractive; she is just like a rosebud. What roguish eyes! what teeth! what gracefulness! But if you are engaged to the other sister, I have nothing to say. But what comes up to prettiness! And it would be the same family——”

These remarks made a strange impression upon Gonzalo. It was the formulation of what he had vaguely felt in an uncomfortable way ever since the previous evening. Yes, it was quite true, what beautiful eyes, how mischievous, and yet how candid! What an alabaster skin! What lips, what teeth, what golden hair! Cecilia, poor thing, was plainer than when he went away and less attractive. How was it possible that she had taken his fancy? Gonzalo had, in fact, to confess to himself that she had never taken his fancy as Venturita certainly now had. Why then—? Well, it was no use asking questions. He was only a lad at the time; he had not been accustomed to seeing ladies; Cecilia's kindness had impressed him. Then there was a certain satisfaction in being engaged. Then the distance which enhances the beauty and increases the value of things. In fact, everything had combined to bind him to that girl. But, if only he had seen Venturita sooner! It was better not to think of that. The affair was too far gone to be retracted. Unlike himself, he remained a good quarter of an hour pensively looking at the marble balls without seeing them. Don Feliciano had gone. At last his healthy, sanguine temperament asserted itself over the ridiculous fancies that threatened to disturb him. He rose from his seat, the frown which had

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momentarily darkened his brow was soon banished by the genial smile which was his particular attraction. He shrugged his shoulders with contempt, and that gesture seemed to say: "I am going to marry the plainer of the De Belinchon girls. Well, and what then? In any case it would have been with one or the other, unless I married no one. I want to be happy. It is not necessary for happiness to come from without; I have it within, in the even temper God has given me, in the money left me by my parents, in this marvellous health, and in this ox-like strength."

When he returned to the sitting-room, he found that all the habitués had been thrown into great perturbation by the news just brought in by Severino, of the iron-mongery shop.

"Don't you know what has happened, sirs?" They all left their seats and surrounded the storekeeper, who spoke with visible agitation.

"Don Laureano was robbed and assassinated last night."

"What, Don Laureano, who lives in the country house?"

"Yes, he of Las Acenas. They say that, at half-past two, or thereabouts, nine men, masked, entered the house; they knocked the servant down with sticks, they tied up the señora and the maidservant, and they killed Don Laureano. What they must have made them suffer before they gave up the money! The good man only had twelve thousand reals, and those he had hidden away, but they tortured the women until they made them disclose the hiding-place." A shudder of horror went through the notabilities of Sarrio. They turned as pale as if they had assisted at that fearful scene. The house of Las Acenas was a mile from the town, in the

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solitude of a pine forest, but nobody took that into account; they imagined themselves assaulted in their houses in la Rua Nueva or de Caborana and cruelly assassinated. Oh! what acts of violence! Santo Cristo, what atrocities!

The first moments of surprise that elapsed were followed by remarks in low voices. The robbers could not be very far off. Such a thing had never happened before in Sarrio, or its environs, in anybody's recollection. Marin asserted that he had seen some suspicious-looking men about for some days past. This news gave rise to an inward panic among the bystanders. They all determined not to go out any more at night, but this determination they kept to themselves.

The *alcalde* said that, in his opinion, the robbers must have come from Castile.

"From Castile?"

"Yes, señor; from Castile."

"I have heard my father (who is now in glory) say that, in the year 1805, seventeen men, armed, and on horseback, appeared in Sariego. They prowled round the place, and finally robbed Don Jose Maria Herrero of seventy thousand crowns that he had hidden under one of the bricks of the hearth."

At any other time, the *café habitués* would have said that because such an event had happened in the year five, it did not necessarily imply that the same thing should occur in Las Acenas in the year sixty, but just then no one felt equal to controverting the statement.

Then they continued to talk of the event of Las Acenas in subdued tones, and they seemed all to concur in the wildest, most extravagant ideas. But as Gabino Maza was never known to agree for more than ten minutes together to what was said in his presence, he suddenly

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seized the opportunity of some very silly remark, made by Don Feliciano Gomez with the perfect naturalness and modesty that characterized the conversation of this distinguished merchant, to pounce upon him in a manner as violent as it was unjustifiable.

“What ridiculous thing will you think of next? What is the good of a house-to-house visitation? Do you think you are going to find Don Laureano’s money in a heap there?”

“If the money is not found, some trace might be discovered.”

“Of what? you dunderhead, of what?”

Then the dispute had full swing. The cries and noise were indescribable. At last, as usual, nobody could hear anything, nobody could understand anything. The voices were perfectly audible over the whole Plaza de la Marina, but the people were so used to it that they did not stop to listen.

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CHAPTER V

BURGLARS

THE notables of Sarrio resolved to abstain from setting foot in the streets at night, therefore the club, Graell's shop-parlor, and even Morana's, were all deserted at an early hour. The five or six locksmiths in the town were given more orders for locks, bolts, iron bars, and patent keys than they could execute.

The robbers of Las Acenas had not been caught, and every one declared, with more or less authority, that they were still prowling about the place, ready to slip in anywhere at some unexpected minute. Nevertheless, as one gets accustomed to everything, even illness, and even to the discussions at the athenæum, they became accustomed to the danger, and again sallied forth of an evening, after taking great precautions to well lock up their houses.

The first to venture was Marin. As all Doña Brigida's efforts to induce him to retire to rest at a reasonable hour were of no avail, she let him go out without any pity.

Don Jaime asked permission to carry under the blue military cloak that he wore at night an old, short gun kept in the garret, and the magnanimous señora granted the permission under the condition that he take it unloaded. Then Alvaro Peña sallied forth, for having a certain military reputation and being a man of reputed courage, it behooved him to show bravery at such a critical time.

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He carried two saddle pistols in his pockets, and a sword-stick in his hand.

The *alcalde*, Don Roque, who from time immemorial had repaired to Morana's with Don Segis, the chaplain of the Augustine convent, and Don Benigno, the curate of the parish, there to imbibe in the course of the evening from four to eight quarterns of Rueda wine, could not put up with the domestic hearth for more than three days; so he also sallied forth into the town.

The octogenarian official, Marcones, armed with carbine and sword, accompanied his chief, himself carrying a revolver and a sword-stick. Don Melchor, Gabino Maza, Don Pedro Miranda, Delaunay, Don Mateo, and all the others soon followed suit, and repaired to the nocturnal resorts. The West Indians held out longer. Thus Graell's parlor, Morana's, and the Club were transformed into veritable arsenals at nightfall. Each one, on his arrival, put his war accoutrements against the wall, and on leaving the places they seized them with an intrepid courage worthy of the Biscayan blood that coursed in the veins of nearly all of them.

The old-fashioned arquebus stood side by side with the modern twelve-chambered rifle, the cylindrical iron sword by the steel-bladed modern sword-stick, the heavy bronze pistol by the plated revolver. And this diversity of war accoutrements served to sustain the warlike spirit so necessary for the occasion.

Certain other measures of great utility had been adopted. The watchmen had orders not to extinguish any street lamp until twelve o'clock at night. They were provided with more powerful whistles than the old ones; and they had orders to keep their eyes on any stranger passing along the streets at night. The townsfolk wisely agreed among themselves not to make way

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on the sidewalk for anybody, as it might not be a friend, and everybody knows how propitious to criminals the custom of making way on the sidewalk is. Full of this idea, Don Pedro Miranda and Don Feliciano Gomez met one night in the Calle de San Florencio. They were both muffled up in their cloaks, with their swords unsheathed, prepared for any emergency, when Don Feliciano cried to Don Pedro from afar :

"Well, friend, make way!"

"Bah! bah! make way yourself," returned Don Pedro.

"You are the one to make way," replied the merchant; "make way, make way."

"Bah, bah, be kind enough to let me pass," returned Señor Miranda. Neither man budged an inch. They unmuffled themselves and unsheathed their swords.

"Will you have the kindness?"

"Will you have the goodness?"

Who knows what awful tragedy might not have taken place in Sarrio at that instant, if they had not recognized each other?

"Does it happen to be Don Feliciano?"

"Is it Don Pedro?"

"Don Feliciano!"

"Don Pedro!"

And rushing to each other, they shook hands with effusion.

"What a fate would have been yours had I not recognized you, Don Feliciano!" exclaimed Señor Miranda, showing his broad iron sword with its bone handle.

"And yours would not have been agreeable, Don Pedro!" returned the merchant, as he made passes in the air with his finely polished Toledo blade.

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One had to go down two steps to enter Morana's shop. The shop was a confectioner's, although it did not look like it; it was the only confectioner's in Sarrio. Nowadays there are three, if I am not mistaken. I say, it did not look like a confectioner's, because church tapers, wax hands and feet and bodies for votive offerings were sold there and had gradually become the chief stock in trade instead of a mere supplementary one; and this was due to the lack of greediness in the town, which speaks very well for it. It is usual in Spain for the folk of little villages and towns to be passionately fond of sweets, for want of the pleasures peculiar to great towns, for, say what one may, the pleasures of the table even are not equal in small towns to those of large ones. In the first place, clever cooks are not forthcoming, the food has not the variety induced by the laws of biology, and the palate has not risen to the state of culture from a right and just estimate of the culinary science.

Perhaps it will be remarked: "But the nuns of St. Augustine used to make sweets." Yes, but we must remember that this manufacture was limited exclusively to preserves of cherry, quince, pear, and apricot, almond tart and burrage tart, and a particular sweetmeat shaped like fishes' fins, called orange flower.

I can only repeat the fact that there are few *bon-vivants* in Sarrio. After all, rare as this abstemiousness may be in towns in the interior, it is common in maritime places, which are known to be less under ecclesiastical sway. For observation teaches the visitor of the towns that more sweets are consumed where church services and religious rites absorb the greater part of life, and where enthusiasm for the religious sentiment is evinced in nones, masses, confraternities, and canonries,

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which shows that there must be some mysterious affinity between mysticism and sweetmeats. This branch of Morana's business was exhibited in the shop by two pine-wood cupboards, painted blue, with glass doors at either end of the counter. In these cupboards there was a fair show of caramels, spiral cakes, sugar cakes, almond cakes, madeleines, and above all the celebrated tablets, the renown of which must certainly have reached the ears of our readers, as it dates from remotest time. The secret of the magic composition of these tablets we have never been able to discover, but their fascination was irresistible, and, strange to say, it was based upon their extraordinary hardness. At the age when Morana's tablets are eaten, the chief thing is not that the sweets should be delicate, savory, and exquisite, but that they should last a long time. It was not easy to get the teeth into them at all, but once in this stick-jaw paste, the extrication from it presented a really difficult problem.

Allow me to offer a delicate tribute of affection and gratitude to these tablets which, from four to eight years of age, constituted the greatest joy of my existence.

It is perhaps to their sweet influence that the author of this book owes the optimistic spirit which, according to the critics, shines in his works.

Morana, daughter and successor of another Morana, who was dead, was a woman of forty years of age, of a pallid complexion, with gutta-percha plaisters on her temples for the severe pains in her head.

She married a Juan Chrysostom, who, according to Don Segis, the chaplain, did not take after his patron saint.

Nevertheless, when he administered corporal punish-

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ment to his wife, he seasoned it with rather a rare amount of learned talk.

"I who love this woman," he exclaimed, as he commenced operations—"I who loved this woman like a wife, and not like a servant, according to the Apostle Paul's command—you have read the Apostle Saint Paul?—what right have you to read, you great ass!"

The wine was very good, one can almost say it was the only good thing in the place, and that was because it did not remain long in the bottle, for Don Roque, Don Segis, Don Benigno, Don Juan "the old Salt," and Señor Anselmo the cabinet-maker, took care to empty it. It was a white wine, strong and superior, and it went to one's head with alarming facility.

The habitués of the shop left every night between eleven and twelve, rather stumbling in their gait, but silent and quiet, which prevented any scandal. They sallied forth arm in arm, leaning one against the other, and they went along without saying a word, albeit with much puffing and blowing.

Their instinct, which never completely left them, instigated this prudent behavior, for they knew if they spoke much or little, some dispute would arise and then a scandal would ensue. Not a word—not a word; it was better even not to whisper—and when they arrived at their houses, they murmured a gruff "good-night" and the one left last was Don Roque, as he lived further away than anybody.

So these venerable men got intoxicated every night in this solemn, quiet, patriarchal fashion.

Two of them, Don Juan "the old Salt," the clerk of the harbor-master, and Don Segis, were reaping the consequences of that course. "The old Salt" had a nose enough to frighten one. When least expected, the hour

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of retribution came for Don Segis, who, seized with an apoplectic fit, was left with one leg dragging as if a weight of six pounds were tied to it. It is true that the insatiable chaplain was not contented with his four quarterns of wine at the confectioner's; he made Morana give him a glass of gin in each, which greatly added to the expense; if he had six quarterns of wine, he had six glasses of gin; if eight, eight; and so on. The effect of all this gin was evident.

"But, Don Segis, how can you drink so much gin at a time?"

"There is nothing for it," he replied in a tone of humility; "if I did not take a glass with every quartern, child of my soul, what would become of me? I should be ill."

The conversations at Morana's were less exciting and thrilling than those of the Club. Very few things interested these old parties; the most important local matters, which excited storms in the Club, were here treated, or rather touched upon, with indifference.

When the Gonzalez sent off the captain of the "Carmen" and put an Andalusian in his place, they only said in a quiet tone:

"If the Gonzalez have done so, they had reasons for doing it," for they were quite indifferent on the subject.

"It is true," said another, after some time, raising his glass to his lips.

"Ripalda seems a good fellow," said a third, after five minutes, as he put his glass down on the counter.

"Yes, he seems so," replied another gravely.

Ten minutes passed in meditation. The habitués gave affectionate kisses to their glasses, which shone like topaz. Don Roque at last broke the silence.

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"There is no manner of doubt that Don Antonio embraced her."

"Embraced her," said Don Juan the Salt.

"Embraced her," echoed Don Benigno.

"Embraced her," corroborated Señor Anselmo.

"Really embraced her," added Don Segis in a lugubrious tone.

Their minds were occasionally exercised on the subject of dovescots. Señor Anselm and Don Benigno were devotedly attached to this pursuit; each had his dovescot, his doves, and mode of management, and long and lively discussions were held occasionally on the subject. The others listened without daring to give an opinion, as they raised their glasses to their lips in solemn silence.

The crime of Las Acenas horrified them, but it did not cause as great a commotion as in the rest of the neighborhood. At the end of five or six days they returned to their patriarchal customs, and such was their bravery that the majority left their arms behind in the shop.

It was nearer one o'clock than twelve when Don Roque, who had exceeded by three quarters his usual six, sallied forth with the other five frequenters of the confectioner's in a serried line to their different homes.

Marcones closed the file with his gun on his shoulder. The first of the line was Don Segis, who lived in a little two-windowed house, close to the Augustine convent; then came Don Juan "the Salt," then the coadjutor, and finally Señor Anselmo, pulling out the enormous shining key with which he beat time when he conducted the orchestra, and opened the apartment where he slept.

The mayor remained with his aide-de-camp. He said something, but his aide-de-camp did not hear him. They directed their steps towards home, which was not far off. But before arriving there, Don Roque, who

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puffed and blew like a whale, and whose walk was unmistakably like the gait of that creature, suddenly stopped and gave a long discourse in a loud voice, of which Marcones caught nothing but the word "robbers" repeated several times. The official, alarmed, looked all round to see if he could see anybody whilst loading his gun, but he saw nothing to give him reason to suppose that the villains were at hand. Don Roque made another remark, if such a term can be applied to a series of strange, intermittent sounds, both horrible and depressing, but Marcones managed to gather that his chief wished a battle made in search of the criminals of Las Acenas. Marcones thought that the force was hardly equal to the undertaking; but discipline forbade objections. Moreover, he nourished the hope that few murderers cared about taking the fresh air at such an hour. So, after a careful examination of their weapons, they took their dangerous course through all the streets and alleys of the town. One is bound in honor to state that Don Roque walked in front as the leader of the valorous enterprise, with his revolver in his left hand, and his sword-stick in his right, leaving his noble breast a mark for the enemy's bullet. Marcones, weighed down by the weight of his gun and his eighty-two years of age, walked six steps behind.

It was a moonlight night, but great black clouds occasionally darkened the sky, and the light of the petroleum lamps burning at the corners of the streets was not sufficient to banish the gloom in them.

Sarrio had five chief streets, known respectively as Rua Nueva, which runs to the harbor; the Calles of Carborana, of San Florencio, of La Herreria, and of Atras. These streets, long and narrow, run parallel to each other. The buildings are generally low and poor.

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Other smaller streets cross and communicate with the principal ones, and lead to branch roads where the spacious residences of the West Indians are built, and which constitute what may be termed the suburb of Sarrio.

As the party was passing through the Calle de Atras, near to that of Santa Brigida, they heard cries and lamentations, which obliged them to halt.

"What's that, Marcones?" asked the *alcalde*.

The old official shrugged his shoulders philosophically.

"Nothing, señior; it is at Patina Santa's."

"How dare they commit these enormities? Let us go there. Let us proceed."

"Let us proceed," was a phrase both used and abused by Don Roque, as it conveyed his sense of the decision, rapidity, and energy of his authority to remedy all grievances. Patina Santa was the great high priest of one of the two temples of pleasure existing in Sarrio, but the sordid, wretched appearance of these temples was quite unlike the ancient famous ones of Greece.

"What scandal is this?" cried Don Roque in his stentorian voice as he approached the miserable dwelling.

Three or four lads in the street flew away like birds at the sight of the dignitary, but the doves remained.

Two of them stood at the door and two more were at the windows. Those at the door wished to withdraw at the sight of the *alcalde*, but he caught hold of them.

"What is this scandal—eh?" he repeated.

The girls began to explain the cause of the commotion, but hardly had they uttered a word than Don Roque interrupted them, vociferating:

"To prison with you!"

"But, Señor *Alcalde*!"

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"To the prison—bah ! To the prison, away with you all ! Be off, everybody ! Where is the ruffian Patina ?"

Merciful heavens, what a commotion then ensued !

The girls at the windows had nothing for it but to come downstairs, and Patina came with them, for Don Roque brooked no delay. Cries and lamentations filled the air, whilst the strident voice of the *alcalde* cried out incessantly:

"To the prison—bah ! To the prison—ah !"

The unhappy creatures called on God and the Virgin; but the *alcalde*, with his infuriated face and flaming eyes, raised his voice still higher as he deafened himself with his cry:

"To the prison—ah ! To the prison—ah !"

There was no help for it.

The watchman, who had approached at the sound of the first ah's, led them off to the town prison, in attendance on his worthy chief, whilst the neighbors watched the scene from behind their window-panes in mingled compassion and derision.

Don Roque exercised his authority by locking the door of the dovecot himself, and handed the key over to Marcones, and with the usual "Proceed," they continued their perilous course. The *alcalde* and his aide-de-camp had not gone very far when, in one of the narrowest and dirtiest streets, they espied a man's figure cautiously approaching a door, which he tried to open.

"Stop!" whispered Don Roque in the ear of his subordinate. "There is one of the thieves."

The official only caught the last word, but it was enough to make him drop his gun.

"Don't tremble, Marcones, for there is only one," said the *alcalde*, seizing him by the arm.

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If the venerable Marcones had been at that moment in full possession of his faculties of observation, he might have detected a decided tendency to a convulsive movement in the hand of his chief. The thief, hearing the steps of the patrol, suddenly turned his head and stood motionless, with his hand still on the door-handle. Don Roque and his companion also stood motionless, and the moon appearing from under a cloud shed its light upon the direful scene.

"Hsh ! hsh ! friend," said the magistrate at the end of some time, without advancing a step.

The robber heard this exclamation of authority, and took flight at one and the same moment.

"At him, Marcones! Fire!" cried Don Roque, courageously running in pursuit of the criminal.

Marcones wished to follow his chief's injunction, but fear made him helpless.

The trigger fell without emitting a spark. Then, with martial promptitude, he cast aside the weapon, which was useless, drew his sword and made valiant efforts to keep pace with the *alcalde*, who, with intrepid courage, was at least twenty paces in advance, in pursuit of the robber.

The fellow now disappeared round the corner of a street.

But arrived there the pursuers saw him attempting to gain the next.

"Boom !"

Don Roque fired his revolver, crying at the same time:

"Take that, thief!"

He again disappeared, and again they caught sight of him in the Calle de la Misericordia.

Boom! Another shot from Don Roque.

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"Take that, thief!" But the villain, doubtless as a last resource, and to prevent any watchman stopping him, began also to cry:

"Thieves! Thieves!"

Then the sharp, long whistles of the watchmen were heard, followed by another and another.

The street of San Florencio was well lighted, and the criminal was clearly visible, trying to get quickly under the shadow of the houses.

Boom! Boom!

"Take that, thief!"

"Thieves!" returned the fugitive, without ceasing flight.

Two watchmen joined the column of attack, and ran, brandishing their pikes, by the side of the *alcalde*.

The thief seemed, at all cost, anxious to reach the Rua Nueva, so as to gain the harbor, where he could secure himself in a boat, or cast himself into the water. But before arriving there he stumbled and fell prostrate on the ground. Thanks to this accident, the patrol gained upon him considerably, and had almost reached him when the villain jumped up with great celerity and flew off swifter than the wind. Don Roque fired off the last two shots of his revolver, still crying:

"Take that, thief!"

He disappeared round the corner of the Rua Nueva. Arrived there, the magistrate and his force, now near the Plaza de la Marina, saw no sign of the criminal anywhere. They took a few hesitating steps on to the said plaza, and there they stopped, not knowing what course to take. "To the mole! To the mole! He must be there," said a watchman.

They were just about to proceed farther when a window of one of the houses was suddenly opened and a

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man in night attire said in sonorous tones that resounded in the silence of the night:

"The thief has just entered the Café de la Marina."

These words were uttered by Don Feliciano Gomez.

When the patrol heard them it rushed to the door of the café and abruptly made its entrance. The sitting-room was empty. There at the end, by the side of the counter, were three or four lads in white aprons standing round a man who was lying, more than sitting, upon a chair.

The *alcalde*, the officer, and the watchmen rushed at him with their pikes, swords, and sword-sticks at his chest, and all with one accord cried:

"Take that, thief!"

The criminal raised his terror-stricken face, now whiter than wax.

"Ah—if it is not Don Jaime, God bless my soul!" exclaimed a watchman, lowering his pike. All the others did the same, dumb with astonishment. For indeed it was a fact that the villain they had so hotly pursued was no other than Don Jaime Marin, taken unawares as he was about to enter the door of his house.

They had to carry him home and bleed him. On the following day Don Roque appeared to ask his pardon, which was granted. But Doña Brigida, his severe spouse, would not grant it until she had given expression to a storm of recriminatory adjectives, among which that of "drunken" figured frequently.

Don Roque submitted meekly to the attack, and the matter dropped.

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CHAPTER VI

CECILIA'S TROUSSEAU

PREPARATIONS for the wedding commenced in the Belinchon household. They were started very cautiously. Doña Paula sent for Nieves, the embroideress, and a long conference ensued with closed doors. Then patterns were ordered from Madrid, and a few days later the señora, accompanied by Cecilia and Pablito, took a journey to the capital of the province in the family coach. The prying Don Petra, who was passing along the Rua Nueva as Doña Paula and her children returned, saw the servant take from the carriage large, heavy parcels that looked like bales of material.

All Sarrio then soon knew that preparations for the trousseau of Don Rosendo's eldest daughter had commenced, and Doña Paula had one of her heart attacks when she heard that it was known. The blame was cast on Nieves, but she declared that she had never breathed a word on the subject. Doña Paula declared she must have done so; the embroideress wept, and there was a regular scene.

Well, as the cat was out of the bag, there was no use making any more mystery about it. The room at the back of the house, the one that looked on to the Calle de Carborana, was the scene of operations for the staff working at the linen under Doña Paula's orders and Nieves's instruction. It consisted of four persons besides the two maids of the house, when domestic duties permitted, and Venturita, and Cecilia herself. It was a

Cecilia's Trousseau

merry party, as work did not prevent chatting, laughing, and singing all day long. Merriment welled from the young creatures' hearts, and bubbled forth in aimless laughter that sometimes lasted a long time. If one of them dropped the scissors—laughter; if a skein of thread caught on a neck—laughter; if the cook came with a red face to ask the señora for the money for the milkwoman—hearty laughter. Not only were those working at Cecilia's trousseau young and merry, but from the directress herself they were all pretty. Nieves was a tall, graceful, red-haired girl, with a white, transparent skin, clear blue eyes, a perfect nose and mouth, twenty years of age, and endowed with a disposition that was Heaven's own blessing. It was impossible to be long melancholy in her company. Not that she was talkative or witty, nothing of the sort; the poor girl had little more intellect than a fish, but her boundless good-humor shone from her eyes in such a charming manner, and rung forth from her throat in such clear tones, that it was quite infectious. By the work of her hands she supported a paralytic mother, and a bad, idle brother, who treated her shamefully when she was unable to give him sufficient money with which to get intoxicated. Her troubles, which would have been insupportable to anybody else, only momentarily disturbed her equanimity, and rising above them, she soon recovered her habitual cheerful spirits. She enjoyed the blessing of perfect health, the only pain she ever knew being an occasional stitch in the side from overmuch laughter. Valentina, also an embroideress, and also with red hair, was not so pretty; her eyes were smaller, her skin less delicate, her nose less regular, and smaller of stature. On the other hand, her bright locks were curly, and clustered very prettily on her forehead, her hands and

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feet were smaller and more delicate than those of Nieves, and the striking point of her face was a constant little trick of knitting her brows, which gave a pleasant piquancy to her features, as it was not due to bad temper.

Encarnacion was a needlewoman too; she was a great, strong, bouncing girl with a vulgar face. The artisans of Sarrio thought she was the flower of the flock, but she would not have pleased the taste of a refined, intelligent person.

Teresa, also of the same trade, was perfectly Moorish in coloring; her hair was as black as jet, and her large eyes were as dark as her hair, and her nose and mouth were regular; she was considered ugly in the town on account of her swarthiness, but she was really a type of Oriental beauty. There was nothing remarkable in Generosa, one of the two maids of the house. Elvira, the other, was a pale little thing, with large, languid eyes, and very graceful figure.

The working classes of Sarrio have never gone in for the ridiculous imitation of ladies, which is so frequent nowadays in other places in Spain. They think, and I am of the same opinion, that the fashions adopted by ladies would not enhance their natural grace; in fact, they would lessen it. And this is logical, for, in the first place, they are not accustomed to drawing their waists in, as fashion demands of its slaves, and as little towns have no good dressmakers, the imitation would be both inferior and ugly; whereas, who upon the terrestrial globe, or upon any other globe, can compete with the charm of the girls of Sarrio when they don the richly embroidered fichu, crossed in front, and tied behind? Who can equal their fascinating mode of arranging the curls on their foreheads with a studied carelessness? Who can take part in a giraldilla with more consum-

Cecilia's Trousseau

mate grace, or give in a more coquettish way a push to a young fellow who gets out of his place, whilst saying with a mingled smile and frown:

"Good fellow, you are mad, or on the road to it. Look out, or I shall pinch you!"

Who can sing with more sentiment and with less ear the couplet:

"When Aben Hamet Granada left,
He felt his heart of joy bereft."

There is no doubt that the artisan girls of Sarrio, whose strict ideas of taste are the admiration of both Spaniards and foreigners, especially nowadays when characteristic features are on the wane, are quite right to maintain their independence and to hold their own costume in spite of the dressed-up young ladies of the cities. Because (be it said softly, so as not to be overheard), the truth is they are much prettier. And this I say without meaning offence to anybody in particular; Heaven forbid.

There is no traveller in the Peninsula who, on thinking of Sarrio, will not echo this assertion with more of the enthusiasm natural to him.

There is no Englishman who stops for a few days at this port but who, when talking to his friends at Cardiff or Bristol of this *Spanish town*, will begin by raising his eyebrows and smacking his lips with delight, with "Oh! oh! oh! Sarrio! the young girls there are very, very, very beautiful." And if Englishmen say it, what will be said by the Spaniards, and particularly those who have lived so long under their beneficent influence?

The four workers, including Nieves, although she was rather superior, belonged to this much-admired class of women for whose prosperity and continuance in

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their ways I offer daily prayers to Heaven, and advise every good Catholic to do the same.

On working days they were dressed in cotton gowns, with a little woollen fichu tied behind and a silk handkerchief falling back on the neck from the uncovered head. Nieves, as an exception, wore a black fringed fichu.

They had just sat down to work after dinner. The sun poured through the panes of the two windows despite the blinds. The workers were gathered together in one of the corners of the room to escape its rays. Teresa, the most musical of the party, started a sentimental song in sad, drawn-out cadences in a sweet, timid voice, so that the others should join in parts; and in effect Nieves soon "took second," and the rest followed suit, some taking first and others second, which resulted in a somewhat melancholy harmony, tinged with romance. Romance may vanish from customs, and be banished from the novel and the stage, but it still finds a delicious haven of rest in the hearts of the artisans of Sarrio. The music continued until Pablito saw fit to disturb it by breaking in suddenly with his bleating voice. The needlewomen stopped singing, raised their heads in alarm, and then burst out laughing.

"Madre! what a fright you gave me!"

"I thought it was a cow!"

"And I thought it was a cock crowing—and I still think so," said Venturita.

The handsome Pablito, reclining in his armchair in the other corner, laughed loudly at his own expense. He certainly was of a jocose turn of mind, as we shall have occasion to see later on. From the time of the commencement of his sister's trousseau Pablito evinced a sudden taste for a sedentary life that had not hitherto

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been noticeable in him. Who had ever seen him before stop a minute in the house after dinner? Who would have thought that he could spend the morning in that armchair chatting with the workers? Nevertheless, it was a fact. For the last month he had not been out riding or driving, and he did not spend more than an hour in the stable during the course of the day.

Piscis was quite upset. He came every day to fetch him out, but it was in vain.

"Look here, Piscis, I have to clean my silver spurs, so I cannot go out." "I say, Piscis, I have to go and get a bill of exchange cashed for papa." "Look here, Piscis, Linda is ill and can't be ridden."

"She is all right now," growled Piscis.

"Have you come from the stable?"

"Yes."

"Well, anyhow, I can't go out to-day—I am out of sorts."

Sometimes Piscis entered the room and sat waiting silently; it was certainly not for long, because he was always thinking the women were making fun of him, and this prevented him being at his ease. When he thought the right moment had arrived, or when he noticed symptoms of boredom in Pablo, or when some other circumstance beyond our province occurred, he rose from his seat and made a sign with his hand to his friend as he gave a long, low whistle, for they understood each other better by whistles than by words. They both objected to articulate sounds and eschewed their use in each other's company, but Pablito did not relish the sign at that moment.

"I say, Piscis," he said, "I am dreadfully idle. Be so kind as to go to the stable and ask Pepe to put another oil compress on Romeo."

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"I will do it," returned Piscis with a frowning face.

"All right, Piscis; thank you very much. Ta, ta! You will come to-morrow, eh? Perhaps I shall be able to ride then."

This was said with great suavity and amiability, to throw his friend off the scent. Piscis growled a "good day" without turning to the company, and left with his eyes aflame, uglier and more demoniacal-looking than ever. The same thing occurred the next day. In spite of his respect for Pablito, Piscis then came to the conclusion that he admired one of the needlewomen. Which? His perspicacity could not solve that question.

The young people commenced singing, but coming to the words:

"Only thou, Divine woman,
Said a prayer
At my solitary tomb,"

Pablito gave vent to such a discordant bellow that they all burst out laughing; but Venturita became serious.

"Look here, Pablo, if you go on like that, you had better go off with Piscis."

It was then Pablito's turn to be cross.

"I shall go when I feel inclined. You are always the one to spoil everything"

Young Belinchon meant to infer that his sister Venturita was the only one who failed to recognize the gifts which heaven had bestowed on him, and this was true; and all the company laughed as if they had heard a passage from "Rabelais" instead of a cross remark. Doña Paula, who had an idolatrous admiration for her first-born, and nourished a grudge against the girl for her sharp remarks, which she considered were not warranted by her beauty, came to her son's assistance:

"You are quite right, Pablo! She always does throw

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cold water on any enjoyment. Goodness, what a girl! The man who takes her will have something to do to keep her in order."

At that moment Gonzalo appeared at the door of the room; he bent like a bow to shake hands with his future sister-in-law, Ventura, and Cecilia. The latter became serious, for, without turning her head, she knew that all the workers were looking out of the corners of their eyes, and she knew the kind of smile that wreathed their lips. Every day was alike. Before Gonzalo arrived the needlewomen lost no opportunity in teasing the bride.

"Cecilia, which of these garments will you wear the day of your wedding?"

"Señorita, you *will* sleep in these sheets, they are so fine."

"You won't be the only one to find them so."

"I say, you rogue, what a fine young man you've got. You won't have such a handsome fellow, Venturita."

"Who knows!" returned the girl.

Cecilia listened to these words with a smile on her lips, and blushed. Since the commencement of the preparations for the wedding her cheeks, formerly so pale, were almost rosy. This animation, and the light which happiness lent to her eyes, made her look interesting and sweet, if not pretty. There is not a girl who does not become more or less good-looking on the approach of marriage.

Cecilia was naturally silent and reserved without being bad-tempered. She hardly ever spoke, except when she was addressed, and then her replies were sweet, clear, and to the point. Timidity, which lends a certain charm to youth, was not the characteristic trait of her character, but our heroine had a sweet serenity and a certain sympathetic force in all her actions and words

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that revealed the perfect purity of her mind. This serenity was taken by unobservant people, if not for pride, which certainly could not be laid to the charge of Cecilia, for cold-heartedness. Even those who were most often at the house thought she was incapable of conceiving a great and tender passion. Accustomed to see her fulfil her domestic duties with the regularity of a clock, they would have required a power of penetration not possessed by many to divine the true moral worth of the eldest daughter of the Belinchons. The majority of such beings live and die unappreciated, because they do not possess any of the brilliant qualities that attract all that see them. Innocence may be ranked among the virtues of this class of girl, and rare as it is, it is one least calculated to add to the value of a woman's character. Very few are those who know how to appreciate the beauty of these crystal souls; see them without noticing anything to arouse attention. But the same can be said of certain philters that are poisonous and certain draughts that are life-giving, and because our unpractised, dull eyes cannot discern the elements of life or death that lie dormant in them, are we to say that such do not exist? It was difficult to divine whether sad or pleasant feelings filled Cecilia's heart, but it was not impossible. I do not know if she tried to hide them, or whether her particular nature impelled her to do so, but it was a fact that in her home she was misunderstood, even by her parents. If perchance it was a question of paying calls, or buying a dress, Donna Paula would ask her daughter with solicitude:

"And what do you think, Cecilia?"

"I think it is very nice," was the reply.

"Do you really think it is nice?" said the mother, looking into her eyes.

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"Yes, mama; I think it is nice."

But Doña Paula was always left in doubt as to whether the dress pleased her or not, or what she really thought. She seldom cried, and when she did, she took such pains to hide it that nobody knew of it. Whatever distress she felt was only betrayed by a slight line in her forehead, and great happiness with her was only evinced by a little more intensity in the gentle smile constantly upon her face. When Gonzalo wrote to her from abroad, she went to her mother and gave her the letter directly she read it.

"Do you like the lad?" asked Doña Paula, after reading the letter with more emotion than her daughter had shown in giving it to her.

"Do you like him?" returned the girl.

"I? Yes."

"Then if you and papa like him, I like him too," said Cecilia.

Who would have thought from those cold words that Cecilia had been in love with him for some time? Nevertheless, as love is of all human sentiments the most difficult to conceal, and as there was no need to hide it when her parents' consent had been given, she let it then be seen quite clearly. In temperaments like that of our heroine the slightest indication signifies a good deal. The happiness that filled her heart was soon seen in her face by all who knew her intimately. Few beings have known greater joy on earth than that which Cecilia experienced at that time.

All the litter about the room, the paper patterns, the designs, the linen stretched in frames, the skeins of thread, all spoke a soft mysterious language to her; the *chis chis* of the scissors cutting, the *cruj cruj* of the needles sewing, prophesied future joys to her. Sometimes they said to her:



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"You will be seen, Cecilia, going to mass on Sunday on the arm of your husband. He will carry your prayer-book, he will leave you to go to the altar of Our Lady and will stay behind among the men; then he will wait for you at the door, will offer you the holy water, and then he will give you his arm again."

At other times they seemed to say to her:

"In the morning you will rise very quietly to keep him from waking, you will brush his clothes, you will put the buttons on his shirt, and when the time comes you will give him his chocolate."

Other voices seemed to say:

"And when you have a child!" But here the bride-elect felt her heart swell with delight, her hands trembled, and she cast a rapid glance at the needlewomen, fearing they had noticed her emotion. As the different articles of clothing were finished and ironed Cecilia put them away carefully in a press, and when that was full she took them to a room upstairs, where she artistically and carefully arranged the underclothing, nightcaps, dressing jackets and peignoirs upon long tables, put for the purpose; then she covered them delicately with a linen cloth and left the room, locking the door and putting the key in her pocket.

After greeting the party Gonzalo took a seat near Pablito, and putting his hand familiarly on his shoulder he whispered in his ear:

"Which do you like best?"

And as he bent towards his future brother-in-law he cast an earnest look at Venturita, who returned it with a peculiar glance. Then both turned their eyes to Cecilia, but she had not raised her head from her embroidery frame.

"Nieves," replied Pablo, without hesitation, in his falsetto voice.

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"I knew it, and I applaud your taste," said Gonzalo, laughing. "What a smooth skin—what teeth!"

"And what a figure! First-rate, don't you know?"

Both looked at the embroideress, who raised her head, and seeing that the conversation was about her, she made a face.

"Come, don't talk in a whisper," said Doña Paula with asperity peculiar to the women of the people.

"Let them be, señora," returned Nieves; "they are talking about me, and in that they show their good taste."

"Certainly. Pablo was calling my attention to the ruddiness of certain lips, the transparency of a certain skin, and the golden hue of certain hair."

"Then they were talking of you, Valentina," said Nieves, blushing and nudging her companion.

"What an idea! Don't worry about that, as if we don't know who is the prettiest!" said the other, with evident pique.

"Gently, gently, señoras," exclaimed Gonzalo. "It is true that Pablo began by talking of the perfections of Nieves, but it is certain that he had meant to go on to those of all the rest, if he had not been interrupted. Is it not so, Pablo?"

"Yes, I meant to go on to Valentina."

Whereupon the girl referred to raised her head and looked at him with the half-frowning, half-roguish look that was peculiar to her.

"Take care, Nieves, that these young men don't forget themselves."

Pablo, without heeding the interruption, proceeded:

"And then from Teresa and Encarnacion, Elvira and Generosa, I should have gone on to Venturita, for of course all men are at her feet; to Cecilia, no, for she

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is engaged; and then I should have said something about Señora Doña Paula, who, be it said without offence to anybody, is the most beautiful of all."

"What a humbug!" exclaimed the lady, pleased at her son's flattery.

Then Pablo rose from his armchair and embraced his mother affectionately.

"Get away, get away, flatterer!" she said, laughing.

"Come, open your purse, mama," said Venturita.

"I see! A spiteful remark as usual," exclaimed the young man in a rage, as he turned his head to his sister; but she only smiled to herself maliciously, without raising her head from her embroidery frame.

"You have done a great deal," said Gonzalo in a low voice, as he took a seat by the side of his fiancée.

"So, so," returned Cecilia, looking at him with her large, luminous eyes.

"But, indeed, it is a great deal. Yesterday you had not embroidered this clove. It looks to me like a clove."

"It is jasmine."

"Nor these two leaves, either."

"Bah! That is nothing."

"And what are you embroidering now?"

Cecilia went on plying her needle without answering.

"What are you embroidering now?" asked Gonzalo in a louder voice, thinking that she had not heard.

"A sheet—hush," returned the young girl, slightly raising her eyes in the direction of the embroideress, and quickly dropping them again.

At that moment Gonzalo's and Venturita's eyes met in a meaning glance over Cecilia's head.

"Well, you see, every one to his taste," said Pablito, as he looked fixedly at Nieves, as much as to say:

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"Don't pay any attention. I only say that as a duty."

"What is there to suit everybody, Don Pablo?" asked Valentina in an ironical tone.

"Flowers, girl."

"Give them to the saints."

"And to pretty girls like you."

"If I am not pretty, I precede those that are, without any by your leave."

"The deuce she does! Valentina puts her back up directly one goes near her," exclaimed the snubbed young man.

The joke made the needlewomen laugh.

"Valentina does not like young men," said Encarnacion.

"She is quite right; you get nothing from young men but promises, lost time, and often a lifetime of misery," said Doña Paula sententially, unmindful of her own fortunate lot. "As to that, Sarrio is quite demoralized; there is hardly a girl who keeps company with one of her own class. The young man is at least expected to wear a cravat, to carry a cane and a cigarette-holder, although he may not have a plate to eat off. Young girls do not mind being seen at dusk nowadays with young gentlemen, nor do they object to returning from fairs on the arm of one of them, singing at the top of their voices."

"Poor young things! I don't know what you expect. Because the son of Don Rudesindo married Pepe la Esquila, and the pilot of the 'Trinidad' the Mechacan girl, you think all is gold that glitters. But seeing is believing. Look at Benita, the girl at Señor Matias's, the sacristan. She does not look very pretty now, eh?"

"Benita has her marriage lines," said Encarnacion.

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"Lines, eh? She will see what her lines are worth."

"Señora, the lad cannot desert her; if he does, she will pursue him all her life."

"Silence, silence, chatterbox; who put such ideas into your head?"

"It is a well-known fact that Benita has gone to law."

"Look here, señora," said the dark, sentimental girl, "it is quite true that we run risks, but what are we to do? The artisans of the town are just as bad; they mostly spend Sunday and Monday and one day in the week at the tavern. How many are there who take their wages home to their wives regularly? If the husband is a sailor, he sends it home one quarter, keeps it three quarters, and then keeps it altogether. The supplies ceasing, the unhappy woman is forced to work to get bread for her children. And then in other cases what thanks or reward does the wife get from her husband? If he does go out with her on a Sunday afternoon, he stops at every public house on the road and leaves the poor creature at the door; or if there is some friend with him, he shouts out some insulting remark at her that makes her blush like a peony. Yes, yes, señora, they are all such vagabonds. Goodness knows they are not worth the bread they eat. The other day I met Tomasina—you know the girl at Uncle Rufio's who married one of Prospero's clerks less than a year ago—well, she was at that moment going to get two reals from her father to buy some bread, for she had not had a mouthful all day. Her husband drinks nearly all his wages, so the poor thing has nothing to eat by the middle of the week. God help her! And most nights the great pig comes home hopelessly drunk, and nearly beats her to death. Sometimes the poor thing goes to bed bruised and supperless. And then, seeing these

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things, people want a—well, better hold one's tongue! But I do say, caramba, that if one has to go to the devil, it is better to go in a coach."

"Look here," intervened Valentina, raising her face with its habitual frown, albeit a trifle more pronounced, "don't go on like that; you say you like young gentlemen. Well and good. I don't care; but don't you throw all the dirty water on your own class. If they drink—and there are those that do—don't I also see gentlemen coming home quite intoxicated? And if they do beat their wives, half the time they would not do it, if the women's tongues were not so long, don't you see? And Don Ramon, the music-master, beat his wife when he came home one night. You must know that, as you live near."

"I don't chatter about everything, girl," returned Teresa, somewhat damped by the fear that her swarthy friend would make her reveal her nocturnal perambulations with Donato Rojo, the medical officer of health; "only I say there are many asses."

"Very well, leave them in peace, then, and don't talk of them, and they won't talk of you. Every one for herself, and let sleeping dogs lie."

"Listen, Valentina," said Elvira, smiling maliciously. "Do you think Cosme will beat you when you marry?"

"If I deserve it, he will. I would rather have a blow or two from my Cosme than the scorn of a fine gentleman—so there!"

"That's what I like to hear; take a lesson, take a lesson, girls," said Pablito.

Gonzalo, after talking some time with his bride-elect, left his seat, took three or four turns up and down the room, and finally seated himself by the side of Venturita, with whom he was always on good terms, for they liked

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laughing and joking together after they had once become friendly. The girl was drawing some letters preparatory to embroidering them.

"Don't come teasing here, Gonzalo; we know how badly I draw," she said, whilst the look that she gave the youth was so flashing and provocative that it made him drop his eyes.

"I am not so sure of that. You don't draw badly," he replied in a low voice that slightly trembled, as he bent his face down to the paper which Venturita had on her lap.

"Pure flattery. You will acknowledge that it might be better."

"Better—better—everything in the world might be better. This is good enough."

"You are getting quite a flatterer. I don't want you to make fun of me, do you hear?"

"I don't make fun of anybody, much less of you," he returned, without raising his eyes from the paper, and with his voice lower every minute, and evidently agitated. Venturita kept her eyes fixed upon him with a mocking expression, in which the triumph of satisfied pride was plainly visible.

"Come then, you draw them, Mr. Clever," she said, as she passed him the pencil and paper with gracious condescension.

The youth acceded to the suggestion, as he ventured to raise his eyes to the girl's, but he quickly dropped them as if he feared their magnetism. He took the book from her lap on to his knee, put a piece of white paper on it, and proceeded to draw.

But instead of the letters, he began to sketch, with some skill, the head of a woman; first the hair parted in two braids, then the straight, pretty forehead, then a

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delicate nose, a pretty, short chin joined to the throat by a soft, graceful curve. It was wonderfully like Venturita. The girl, leaning on the shoulder of her future brother, followed the movements of the pencil, and a vain smile gradually overspread her face. After drawing the head Gonzalo proceeded to delineate the figure, and the peignoir, or matinée, worn by the girl was soon reproduced; but he took some time drawing minutely the silk bows with which it was fastened in front. When the picture was finished, Venturita asked him in a mischievous tone:

"Now put underneath who it is."

The young man raised his head and their smiling eyes met. Then, quickly and decisively, he wrote under the drawing:

"The one I love best in all the world."

Venturita took the paper in her hands and looked at it with delight for some moments; then, with a pout of assumed disdain, she gave it back to him, saying:

"Take it, take it, you rude fellow."

But before it reached Gonzalo's hands Cecilia stretched out hers and snatched it from him laughingly, saying:

"What papers are these?"

Then Venturita sprang from her seat, as if she had been stung, and caught hold of her sister's hand.

"Give it up, give it up, Cecilia! Let go!" she cried, with her face aflame and distorted with a forced smile.

"No, I want to see it."

"You shall see it afterwards; let go!"

"I want to see it now."

"Let be, child; let her see it. What does it signify to you?" said Doña Paula.

"I don't like anything being taken from me by

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force," Venturita cried, turning serious. Then realizing that she was losing ground, she resumed her smile, saying:

"Come, Cecilia, let go; don't be disagreeable."

"Don't make such a set out! Let go yourself; you are hurting me."

"Who are you to snatch the paper from my hand?" she returned, and really in a rage. "Let go, let go, you ugly thing, you parrot nose, you fool! Let go or I will scratch you," she added, with her eyes flashing and her face distorted with rage.

Seeing her like this, the smile that had suffused Cecilia's face suddenly left it, and opening her large eyes, full of surprise, she exclaimed:

"Goodness, you seem mad, child. Take it, take it; I don't want it."

So she gave up the paper, which was crumpled in her hand, and Venturita, with her face still distorted with rage, tore it into a thousand pieces.

"In all the days of my life I never saw such a mad creature!" exclaimed Doña Paula in amazement. "Ave Maria! Ave Maria! Wherever did you get such a bad temper from, child?"

"It would be from you," replied Venturita sulkily, without looking at anybody.

"You shameless girl! If it were not for folk being here! How dare you answer your mother like that? Don't you know the commandment of the law of God? I will take you to-morrow to confess to Don Aquilino."

"Very well; give my regards to Don Aquilino."

"Wait a bit, wait a bit, you bad girl!" cried the señora, making as though she would rise to the chastisement of her daughter.

But at that instant the figure of Don Rosendo, in his

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many-colored dressing gown and silk-tasselled velvet cap, appeared at the door.

"What is the matter?" he asked with surprise at the sight of his wife's excited state.

Suffocated with sobs, Doña Paula then proceeded to give him an account of his daughter's want of respect.

Don Rosendo thought it behooved him to frown severely and say in a solemn tone:

"You have behaved badly, Ventura; go and ask your mama's pardon."

We know that he was absent-minded, always absorbed in some idea, so this domestic episode only partially roused him from his preoccupation. Nevertheless, seeing his child obstinate, supercilious, and angry, he repeated his command with greater firmness.

"Come, daughter, go and ask your mother's pardon, seeing that you have been rude to her."

The girl made her usual scornful pout and murmured under her breath:

"As if I should think of doing such a thing!"

"Come, Venturita, what are you muttering there? Come, before I get angry."

"Do, do, Venturita; don't behave like that," implored all the needlewomen in low tones.

"Don't bother me. Will you leave me in peace?" she retorted, also in a low tone, albeit an angry one.

"Won't you do as I tell you?" now demanded Don Rosendo, with increased severity, "won't you?" But the girl sat silent and motionless.

"Then leave the room at once; get out of my sight!" stormed the father.

Venturita rose from her seat and, stiff and sullen, she made her way through the party, and left the room, slamming the door heavily behind her. Don Rosendo,



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after standing a moment motionless with his eyes on the door by which his daughter had made her exit, turned round and said:

“I am sorry to have to be so severe with my children, but sometimes there is no help for it.”

Two Traitors

CHAPTER VII

TWO TRAITORS

THE fierce expression soon faded from Belinchon's fine face, and was superseded by his habitual look of thoughtful abstraction.

"Gonzalo, if it is not troubling you, I wish you would come with me into my study," he said, turning to his future son-in-law.

The young man, who had several times started and turned pale during the last scene, was now filled with dismay, for he feared that the summons betokened nothing less than that Don Rosendo, having a suspicion of the inconstancy of his feelings, was now about to call him to account. So, with his head bent and very anxious, he followed Belinchon into the study, which was a spacious apartment, furnished with the luxury befitting a rich merchant—a massive table and cabinets of mahogany, loaded with parcels of books and papers, a velvet carpet, sofas upholstered with brocade, and a colossal silver inkstand. A quarter of the room was filled with a heap of little packets, wrapped in paper of various colors, which would puzzle anybody who entered it for the first time. Not so Gonzalo, or any intimate friend of the house. Those packages were full of toothpicks!

"How so?" the reader will ask.

Don Rosendo Belinchon, a cod merchant of such renown, a dealer in toothpicks as well?

No, Don Rosendo did not deal in toothpicks; he made them. And this not from any speculative motive, which would have been beneath him, but from a purely

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disinterested love of the thing. He had evinced the taste in early youth, but the assiduous occupations of his trade and the vicissitudes of his life had only hitherto permitted him to indulge his passion in a desultory way in leisure hours. But from the time he could leave his office to a few faithful underlings he gave himself up heart and soul to such a simple and useful amusement. In the morning at Graell's shop, in the afternoon at the saloon, in the evening at home, or at Don Pedro Miranda's, he was always working. His servant spent a great part of the day in preparing perfectly equal pieces of dry wood, from which his dexterous hand produced the queen of toothpicks.

And as he never rested from his work, not even on holidays, the production was so excessive that there was not enough purchasers in town, and when the heap reached from the table to the ceiling he was obliged to despatch packets of them to his friends in the capital. Thanks to the noble efforts of this clever representative of his trade, we can say with pride that Sarrio attained the level of the great capitals in this interesting branch of civilization, and that no other Spanish or foreign town could compete with it, for the house of every rich man, as well as every poor one, boasted a well-cut toothpick, irrefutable testimony of the cultured refinement of its inhabitants.

Don Rosendo signed to the young man to be seated on the sofa, which he did in visible agitation. Then the merchant proceeded to take a chair with an air of mystery, and placing himself opposite the youth, he gave him a dig in the ribs and jauntily said with a smile:

"Well, Gonzalito, and what do you think of this question of the slaughter-house?"

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"The slaughter-house?" asked the young man, opening his eyes wide with surprise.

"Yes, the new slaughter-house; do you think it ought to be put on the Escombrera, or on the Plaza de las Meanas, or at the back of Don Rudesindo's houses?"

Gonzalo seemed to see heaven open and, smiling with pleasure, he replied:

"I think it would be very well on the Plaza de las Meanas. It is very open—very airy there."

Then seeing that a frown gathered on his future father-in-law's forehead, and that the smile suddenly left his face, he added stammeringly:

"I don't think it would be bad at the Escombrera either."

"Much better, Gonzalo; infinitely better."

"Maybe, maybe."

"But it *must* be, and I tell you plainly that to have it on the Plaza de las Meanas (this, mind you, quite between you and me) is an act of utter madness; an act of ut-ter madness," he repeated, with additional stress on each syllable.

"And this opinion of mine," he added, "is not, as you imagine, a thing of yesterday, or of to-day, but of all my life. From the time that I was capable of understanding anything I knew that the slaughter-house ought not to be where it is; in a word, that it ought to be moved. Whither? An internal voice always replied: 'To the Escombrera.' Before I was able to give any scientific reason I was as convinced as I am now that it was there that it ought to be, and nowhere else. Now that the discussion of the problem is at hand, I feel obliged to support this opinion, to communicate my idea to the public, and to give it the result of my meditations. If you have nothing to do, I will now read you

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the letter that I am sending to the 'Progress of Lancia' with this end in view."

And in effect, without waiting for Gonzalo to reply, he turned to the table, took up some sheets of paper that were upon it, put on his spectacles, and approaching the window, he commenced reading the letter in a voice which betrayed his emotion.

The letter was written on business paper, large and ruled. All the letters that for years past he had sent to the "Progress of Lancia" and to other periodicals had been written on the same sort of paper, on both sides. He did not then know that the paper ought only to be written on one side for the press, but he soon acquired that valuable knowledge, as we shall see.

Don Rosendo Belinchon evinced a taste for writing communications to the press almost simultaneously with that for toothpicks; that is to say, it dated from his early years.

A great advocate of human progress, of reform, of all kinds of discussion and instruction, it was natural that the press should inspire him with respect and enthusiasm. Newspapers had always been an indispensable element of his existence. He subscribed to many, both national and foreign, because, being educated for commerce, he was well versed in French and English, and he never missed devoting a couple of hours to reading the journals even on the busiest days. These hours had increased during later years, at the expense of the codfish business. The delight that our hero felt in the morning, after taking his chocolate, in perusing the leading articles of the "Pabellon Nacional," the events of the "Politica," and the light news of the "Figaro," was so intense that the brightness of his face pervaded the atmosphere.

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Like all men of wide and lofty views, he was not exclusive in his press proclivities. He liked a paper as a paper, a pleasant medium of the progress of human reason, or, as he better expressed it, as "a lofty manifestation of public opinion."

The opinions that each supported were secondary matters. He subscribed to papers of every opinion, and enjoyed them all equally. If he had any particular predilection, it was for venomous articles and paragraphs, for their way of saying one thing and conveying another, of twisting phrases in such a manner that an apparently innocent clause was an envenomed shaft, filled Don Rosendo with such delight that he went nearly mad with joy. Sometimes on reading in "*La España*" a paragraph in this style:

"Yesterday the circular of the Señor President of the Supreme Court to his subordinates appeared at last. We congratulate General O'Donnell, the president of the Liberal party, and Señor Negrete and the Democratic Government party on the colossal work that they have consummated in a few moments of lucidity," he would exclaim, waving the paper in his hand:

"What spite, Caracoles; what spite!"

This liking, or, rather, passion for the press, was not fruitless, as we have said. Even in his youth he had sent two letters to a weekly paper published in Lancia, called "*Autumn*," describing the annual festivities that took place in Sarrio in the month of September. These letters were read with profit and no little pleasure in the town, which encouraged him to write three more the following year, giving an account of the marvellous number of rockets that were sent off in Sarrio on the 13th, 14th, and 15th of the month, the beautiful illumination of the 16th, and the magnificent ball given

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at the Lyceum on the night of the 17th. After tasting the sweets of publicity, Don Rosendo could not do less than indulge in them from time to time. The least pretext sufficed for him to send a letter or a communication to the papers. Sometimes he signed them with his name, at other times with some pretty pseudonym or anagram. If the fisher-folk had a *fête* in honor of St. Telmo, Don Rosendo immediately wrote his letter to the "Progress of Lancia" or to the "Bee," describing the decorations, the bonfires, the mass, the procession, etc. If a banquet were given in the new school buildings on their inauguration, three or four days later the Lancian paper contained a letter publishing the speeches and improvised sonnets. If a bricklayer fell from a scaffolding, there was a communication from Don Rosendo asking for better protection for bricklayers who have to go on scaffoldings. If the son of Don Aquilino sang at a mass, there would be a letter from Don Rosendo describing the touching ceremony and praising the clear, musical voice and the serene appearance of the young priest. If the tides were high and strong and broke away some stones from the end of the pier, a letter; if the boats from Bilbao declined to take on board the pilots of Sarrio, a communication; if a harvest of maize were lost by the drought, a letter; if the prevailing winds were from the northeast, a letter. In short, nothing happened on terra firma or in the atmosphere of the town worthy of mention without its being tackled by the clever, flowing pen of our merchant. How much work will the future historians of Sarrio be saved by this valuable material, accumulated by one of its most enlightened sons!

With advancing years Don Rosendo Belinchon's letters assumed a character less romantic, we won't say

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frivolous (for it would not be either correct or respectful to apply such a term to that estimable gentleman); but it was noticeable that the subject-matter was not so much the junketings and recreations of the townsfolk, but something that would tend, directly or indirectly, to forward their moral and material interests. The trades, the schools, the salvage from shipwrecks, the building of a church or a prison, were the matters that he now most frequently treated to his own glory and to that of his birthplace.

One of them, of vital interest for Sarrio, as he maintained, was the slaughter-house. He had not hitherto approached this question, because he knew that his opinion was at variance with that of a large number of his fellow-townsmen. But he considered "that the time had now come to express it without any perambulation or circumlocution."

The letter he now read, the first he had written on the subject, was addressed to the "Progress of Lancia," and it ran thus:

THE SEÑOR DIRECTOR OF THE "PROGRESS OF LANCIA."

Dear Sir: The attention now accorded to natural physical science, and especially to the science of hygiene, as the health of places as well as people depends upon it, in view of its great practical utility, the timidity of those who, influenced by an education as erroneous as it was deficient, condemned the study of these great problems, being cumbered with antiquated, dull ideas, is now happily vanishing under the powerful movement of the nineteenth century, rightly called the century of enlightenment.

Don Rosendo's style was always involved. He continued:

Now that civilization, released from the obstacles that crippled the conscience and the mind, opens a vast field to all, by means of the press, to express our independent ideas and give

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them forth to the world, trusting in the friendship that you have always accorded me, and in the kindness with which the public has hitherto received the humble efforts of the pen, etc., etc.

After three or four more paragraphs in this perambulatory style (which the editor of the "Progress" always had to curtail) Don Rosendo went into the question, putting forward the slaughter-house, or, as he termed it, "the public massacre-hall," in all its bearings, so as to condemn its establishment on the Plaza de las Meanas in terms that left no room for doubt. The reasons given for the opposition were obvious. For one thing, the southeast winds, prevalent during the greater part of the year, would carry miasmatic smells, etc.

For another thing, the difficulty of reaching solid ground for the cementing would cause an enormous expense, etc. The necessity of passing through the town with the cattle, etc. For another thing, the proximity of the houses, the bad effect on the mineral springs, etc.

In fact, Don Rosendo having given more than twenty reasons, in what he termed "a clear, succinct style," he added that they would be given more fully in the forthcoming letters with which he purposed "troubling the readers of the illustrious periodical."

When the reading was over, Gonzalo pronounced the reasoning incontrovertible, and Don Rosendo (with his spectacles on his nose) declared that there was no gain-saying it.

Having arrived at such a perfect understanding, they separated in a befittingly cheerful spirit. Don Rosendo remained in the library to copy his letter, and Gonzalo was about to return to the workroom; but before he left the apartment his future father-in-law called him back to say:

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"Mind, not a word to anybody of this."

"Don Rosendo, I swear!" returned the young man, raising his hand in sign of protest.

The merchant, in an expansive frame of mind, continued:

"You will soon know something else which will be a pleasant surprise to you. It is an idea which came to me two months ago, and which I hope to carry out, God willing, very soon. Oh! it is a brilliant idea! It will make a radical change in Sarrio, you know!"

The mysterious manner, the serious, agitated tone of his voice, the look of triumph which fulminated from his eyes as he spoke, surprised Gonzalo not a little. Nevertheless, he did not dare to ask for explanations, and his future father-in-law let him go with a vacant smile.

The party in the workroom was meanwhile still entertained by Pablito's conversation, which was embellished by practical illustrations, in accordance with his versatile nature.

Venturita had not yet returned, and Gonzalo reseated himself by the side of his fiancée and began talking to her with undisguised embarrassment and timidity, for being unaccustomed to hide his feelings, his treachery weighed upon his soul. Sometimes Cecilia raised her head to reply, and her clear, serene, innocent glance made him blush. To overcome his confusion he thought he had better tell her his love and devotion in more ardent terms than hitherto. Like all irresolute natures, in a time of exigency he took the worst course to give himself a moment's respite. Cecilia received the protestations in silence, without evincing the delight that women generally show on hearing expressions of affection from the one they love.

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"You are very flattering to-day, Don Gonzalo. I don't like being spoiled," she said at last with a smile.

"But it is a pleasure to tell you what I feel," he replied in a choked voice.

"Well, it is a pleasure I do not understand," she returned sweetly. "The deeper my affection the less I like to speak of it."

"That is because you do not really love."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in such a genuine tone of reproach that our young man was taken aback.

"Yes, yes; it is because you are naturally cold. The heat of feeling, like physical heat, cannot remain long concealed; there comes a time when it rises to the surface like the lava of volcanoes. And of all sentiments, love is the one that can best burst the strings of the tongue. It is only really felt when one can say in every tone and in every manner possible, 'I love you.' What you said just now is absurd, for simultaneously with the birth of love in our hearts for anybody there comes the desire to express it; and to satisfy this desire is the greatest of all delights."

"It may be, it may be," she remarked in a doubtful tone. "Although I have not experienced it, I can well imagine it from what I suffer. But, Gonzalo," she added in a tremulous voice, "for God's sake don't measure my affection by my words. I cannot, I can never say what I feel. There seems to be a sort of lump in my throat, and nothing comes but foolish things, insignificant remarks, when I should like to utter words of affection! Oh, it is a torture! It is being like a dog without a tail."

Gonzalo burst out laughing, and the girl, who had spoken more strongly than usual, turned red and bent her head.

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"But nobody has cut out your tongue."

"In this matter you must consider that they have."

"Very well; you must express yourself in writing," and at that moment he turned his head quickly towards the door, which had opened.

It was Piscis. After muttering a "Good afternoon," he took his usual seat in the corner, followed by derisive glances of the needlewomen, towards whom, for this and other reasons, he vowed eternal hatred.

After returning their mocking looks with one that was straight and fierce he remained silent for some minutes, but as his soul was burdened with solemn and profound secrets, and Pablito would not cease his attention to Nieves, he was boiling over with rage. After having whistled to attract his friend's attention, he ventured to disburden his mind in public at the risk of his confidences not being understood and appreciated by the feminine element of the party.

"What is it, Piscis?" asked Pablito, hearing the whistle.

"Do you know why Romeo is neighing?"

Then the needlewomen raised their heads in surprise, and Valentina, trying not to laugh, said to Teresa:

"Child, what is he saying?"

"Why does a horse neigh?"

"Because——"

Although she spoke in a low tone Piscis heard her quite well, and turning from Pablo, who had taken the question quite seriously, and wished to hear about this peculiarity of Romeo's, he said to Valentina in an angry tone:

"Will you be quiet, you chatterbox?"

These strong words were received with an explosion of laughter by the workers.

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"Don't fuss yourself, Piscis; let them be. Well, you took Romeo out? I am glad of that."

"I harnessed him to the *char-à-bancs* with Linda," returned the centaur, with an angry look at the listening Valentina.

"If you could have seen—shiver my shins!—how he behaved! I with the whip, and he, thud, thud, against the splash-board. I returned to the stable and put on the kicking strap. Then I went out again. But what did the creature do this time? He got between the wheel and the traces, and then he began neighing. Dash me! I very nearly broke a lamp."

"I must get to the bottom of this," returned Pablito, profoundly interested, and leaving Nieves to go over to Piscis.

"I must think it over to-night," returned the centaur, looking very grave, "and we will see to-morrow what we can do."

The two friends then lowered their voices and plunged into an animated private discussion.

Gonzalo was disturbed. He kept casting glances at the door, hoping every minute to see Venturita return. Nevertheless, the time went on and the girl did not appear. His abstraction so notably increased that Cecilia had to ask him the same question three times.

"What is the matter? Your thoughts seem to be wandering."

"It is so," he said, slightly coloring; "I recollect that I ought to write to London to-day on an important matter of business, and it is now about six o'clock."

Whereupon he took leave of his fiancée, of Doña Paula, and the rest of the party, and left.

Once in the passage he slackened his steps, and began looking round on all sides without seeing what he wished.

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Then, with bent head, he slowly and sadly descended the staircase and was about to raise the latch of the door when he thought the string by which it was pulled from upstairs shook. He stood a moment motionless. He again raised his hand to the latch, and again noticed the vibration of the cord. Then he turned back, looked up the staircase, and there above a pretty little face was smiling at him.

"Is it you?" he asked in a falsetto voice, his countenance suffused with joy.

"Yes, it is I," replied Venturita in the same tone.

"Do you want me to come up?"

"No," returned the girl, as much as to say, "Why do you ask, sir?" Gonzalo mounted the staircase on the tips of his toes.

"We must not stay here; we shall be seen," said Venturita, taking his hand and leading him along the passage to the dining-room.

There Gonzalo took a seat without leaving hold of her hand.

"I thought I was not going to see you again to-day. What a temper you have, child!" he said, smiling.

Venturita's face clouded.

"If they did not irritate me every minute, I should not have one."

"But recollect, it was your mama who reprimanded you," he replied with a smile.

"What?" she exclaimed passionately. "Why is my mother to annoy me every hour and every minute? If she thinks I am going to stand it she is greatly mistaken. She does not mind what that boor does; she will do anything for him. There is nothing but spoiling for him! Look here, Gonzalo, if you want us to be friends, don't interfere with me." And at these words, uttered

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in an angry tone, her eyes flamed with rage, and she gave a violent pull at her hand to release it. But this Gonzalo did not allow, and kissing it passionately several times, he said, laughing:

"But, my girl, don't be angry with me, who have done nothing. If I admire you, it is just because you are so hot-tempered. I don't like women who are milk-and-watery."

"Because you are so yourself," she replied, now calm and smiling.

"Don't believe it. I am not so milk-and-watery as you think. When I am angry, I am so indeed."

"Bah! Once a year!"

"Well, as I am so, I ought to like quiet, sweet-tempered women."

"You make a mistake; one always likes one's contrast. Fair people like dark people, thin people fat, tall people short. Don't I suit you because you are so tall and I so small?"

"Not only for that," he said, laughing and drawing her towards him.

"Why, then?" she asked, giving him a mocking glance.

"Don't you know? Shall I whisper it to you?"

"Why?" she insisted, keeping her eyes upon him.

"Because you are so very ugly."

"Thank you," she returned, with her face bright with gratified vanity.

"There is no one uglier than you in Sarrio; not in the whole world."

"You have seen uglier in the countries where you have been."

"I assure you, no."

"*Virgen del Amparo!* Then I must be a monster,"

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she cried, accepting the flattering hyperbole of the words.

"Somebody is coming!" said Gonzalo, suddenly turning grave.

Venturita went to the door.

"It is only the cook passing," she said, turning back into the room.

"I think we are in danger here. Suppose your mama or one of the girls came in—or Cecilia" (he added in a low voice)—"what excuse could we give?"

"Something or other; that's a slight matter. But if you are nervous, we can go elsewhere."

"Let us go to the drawing-room."

"No, no; wait a moment. I will go first."

Then stopping at the door, and turning back, she said:

"If you give me your word to be good, I will take you to my room."

"On my word of honor," replied the young man with delight.

"No caresses?"

"None."

"Swear it."

"I swear."

"Very well; stop here a minute, and then come on tiptoe. *Au revoir!*"

"*Au revoir!*" said Gonzalo, taking one of her hands and kissing it.

"I see what it is," she said, pretending to be angry; "before you come you begin to break your word."

"I did not think that your hands were included in the promise."

"Above all things," she said, with severity in her tone and a smile in her eyes.

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At the end of two minutes the youth followed her, found the door ajar, and entered. Venturita's room was like its mistress, small, pretty, and seductive.

There was a sandalwood bedstead hung with brocaded silk hangings and covered with a blue silk coverlet; an ebony cabinet, inlaid with ivory, which formed an *escritoire* when opened; a comfortable blue velvet arm-chair; a toilet table and looking glass, also hung with silk; a mirrored wardrobe of sandalwood, like the bed; and a few gilt chairs completed the furniture; and the room was as redolent of sweet perfume as the sanctum of an odalisque.

"Oh, this is better than Cecilia's room!" said Gonzalo.

"When did you see that?" asked Venturita.

"A few days ago she showed it to me; bare walls, with a few second-rate pictures, a curtainless bed, a common wardrobe."

"Well, if she doesn't have it like I do, it is because she doesn't care to. I certainly had to get over papa at first. But my sister is so—well, she is as God made her. It is all alike to her. Everything pleases a commonplace person, doesn't it?"

"In this room there is so much taste and so much coquetry, and that there always is about you."

"Why do you accuse me of coquetry, you silly?" she asked, in her old mocking tone.

"Because it is true, and quite right so. Coquetry, when not excessive, adds attraction to beauty as spice adds flavor to food."

"And so I suit your taste! Well, look here; although coquetry may give attraction, or flavor, or what you like, I am not coquettish. You at least have no right to say so. I say—it seems to me——"

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"It is true; you are right; you are very right. I cannot call you coquettish, because the coquetry I was speaking of is quite different."

"Do me the favor to sit down, for I think you have grown enough—and let us leave abstract questions."

Gonzalo dropped into the chair the girl offered him, still under the spell of her brilliant, mischievous eyes. From the minute he entered the room he experienced a delight, half physical, half spiritual, which dominated his senses and his spirit. The perfume that he inhaled mounted to his brain, and the magnetic glance of Venturita hypnotized him.

"You did wrong in bringing me to your room," he said, as he passed his handkerchief over his forehead.

"Why?" she asked, opening and shutting her eyes several times, which were like stars at the close of a hot day in summer.

"Because I don't feel well," he returned, with the same smile.

"You really feel ill?" replied the girl, opening her eyes wide with an innocent expression.

"A little."

"Shall I call anybody?"

"No; it is your eyes that hurt me."

"Oh, come!" she exclaimed, with a laugh, as if that were of no consequence; "then I will shut them."

"Oh, no; don't shut them, or I shall be much worse."

"Then I will go," she said, rising from her chair.

"That would kill me, my girl! Do you know why I am ill? It is because it kills me not to be able to kiss your eyes."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Venturita, with a burst of laughter. "How bad it must be! I am sorry not to be able to cure you."

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"Will you let me die?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. Let me kiss your hair, then."

"No."

"Your hands."

"No."

"Let me kiss something of yours. See, you are doing me a lot of harm."

"Kiss this glove," said the girl, laughing, and taking one from the toilet table. Gonzalo seized it, and kissed it passionately several times.

The reader, who may have denounced Gonzalo in his heart as a disloyal, perfidious fellow, or at least weak, and maybe deserving the appellation of "a disagreeable character," as the critics say when the people in novels are not all as heroic and as clever as might be wished, must imagine himself in that little nest, as full of perfume as the chalice of a magnolia, with the youngest daughter of the Belinchons, dressed in a blue-ribboned peignoir, revealing a good part of her neck, like roses and milk, with her shining blue eyes on him, and a soft, melodious voice that moved his very soul, and if the girl gave him a glove, saying "Kiss it," he must think whether he could refrain from doing so.

"You must calm yourself, Gonzalo," she said, with a smile that would have bewitched St. Anthony.

"Yes, yes."

"Very well. Now we must talk seriously and review the situation."

Gonzalo became grave.

"After what you said to me three days ago I did think that before now you would have said something to mama or papa, or that you would have written. But no; you not only let the time slip by, so that things got

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worse every day, but I see that you are more affectionate and attentive to Cecilia than ever."

Gonzalo made a negative gesture.

"Yes; I saw you a moment ago through the keyhole of the room. Nothing escapes me. Now this is very bad if you don't love her; and if you do love her, it is treating me badly."

"Are you not yet sure that you alone possess my heart?" said the young man, raising his eyes towards her.

"No."

"Then yes, yes; a thousand times yes. But I cannot treat Cecilia in a cold, indifferent manner. That would be very ugly. I prefer to tell her plainly and end the matter once for all."

"Then tell her."

"I do not dare."

"Then don't tell her, and you and I will have done with each another. Better so," returned the girl with impatience.

"For God's sake, don't speak like that, Ventura! I shall think you don't love me. You must understand that my position is awkward, strange, and terrible. To be on the eve of marrying an excellent girl; then without any quarrel whatever, without any warning of any kind, to suddenly say to her: 'It is all over. I cannot marry you because I do not love you, and I never have loved you,' is the most brutal and hateful thing that has ever been known. Besides, I don't know how your parents will take my behavior. It is most probable that, justly indignant on her behalf, they will load me with reproaches and forbid me the house."

"Very well; marry her—and go in peace!" said Venturita, turning somewhat pale.

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"That I'll never do. I marry you, or nobody."

"Then what are we to do?"

"I don't know," returned the youth, hanging his head in distress.

Both remained silent for some seconds. Then Ventura, placing her hand on his head, said:

"Think it over, man; think it over."

"I do, but with no result."

"You can't manage it. Come, then; go along, and leave it to me. I will speak to mama; but you must write a letter to Cecilia."

"Oh, my God! Ventura!" he exclaimed, full of anguish.

"Then what do you want—say?" asked the girl, now in a rage. "Do you think I am going to be made a plaything of?"

"If we could only manage without this letter," returned Gonzalo humbly. "You can't imagine the effort it will be for me. Would it not do if I left off coming to the house for some days?"

"Yes, yes; be off and don't come back!" she replied, taking a step to the door.

But the youth caught her by the tresses of her hair.

"Come, don't be cross, beautiful one; you well know that you have completely conquered and fascinated me, and that I will obey your every command, even to casting myself into the sea. I only told you my opinion—if you don't like it, I have nothing more to say. I only want to avoid hurting Cecilia."

"It is like your conceit!" exclaimed the girl, without turning round. "Do you think Cecilia is going to die of grief?"

"If she is not hurt, so much the better, and I shall be saved remorse."

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"Cecilia is cold; she cannot love or hate much. She is very good, and does not know what selfishness is; but you will always find her the same, neither happy nor sad. She is incapable of either giving or taking offence; at least, if she does take it, nobody knows it. What are you doing?" she added, turning round quickly.

"I am untying the ribbons of your tresses. I want to see your hair loose again. No sight gives me more pleasure."

"If that is your fancy, I will undo them. Stop," said the girl, who had reason to be proud of her hair.

"Oh, how beautiful! It is a marvel of nature!" exclaimed Gonzalo, putting his fingers in it. "Let me bury my face in it; let me bathe in this river of gold."

And so saying, he hid his face in the fair locks of the girl.

But it happened that a few minutes earlier, as the clock struck seven, the seamstresses and the embroideresses left off their work and prepared to leave. Before doing so Valentina was commissioned by Doña Paula to go to Venturita's room to fetch thence some patterns on the wardrobe. So she pushed open the door at the critical moment in which Gonzalo was bathing his face in that original manner. On hearing the sound he rose suddenly and stood, paler than wax. Valentina blushed up to her eyes, and said stammeringly:

"Your mama wants the patterns, those of the other day; they ought to be on the wardrobe."

"They are not on the wardrobe, but inside it," returned Venturita, without any confusion whatsoever.

And turning to the wardrobe, the girl opened a drawer and drew out a paper parcel, which she gave her.

"Stop a moment, Valentina," said Venturita before

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she left the room; "be so kind as to tie my hair, for I cannot do it with this bad finger."

Then she showed that her finger was bleeding, for she had managed to scratch it when getting the patterns out. Valentina, still quite taken aback, proceeded to tie the ribbon.

"Yes, my hair hurt me, and on untying the ribbon I scratched it with the pin which fastened the bow. Poor Gonzalo could not manage to do it very well, eh?" she added, with a laugh.

"Oh, no!" said the youth with a forced smile, amazed at her *sang-froid*. The excuse, well conceived as it was, did not deceive Valentina, who was quite certain of what she had seen.

"Do you think she was taken in by that story of the scratch?" anxiously asked Gonzalo when the girl had left the room.

"Perhaps not, but I don't mind her; she is the stupidest of the lot."

Valentina took the patterns to her mistress, and then started to go home until the following day.

On crossing the hall she distinctly heard the sound of a kiss, and on looking in its direction, towards the dark room, she caught sight of the black and white checks of Nieves' dress.

"So this is the way the wind blows, is it?" she murmured, with that particular little frown that characterized her. Then she descended the staircase and passed into the street, where Cosme was waiting to escort her home.

The Meeting

CHAPTER VIII

MEETING HELD BY THE NOTABLES OF SARRIO IN SUPPORT OF THE FOURTH ESTATE

THE 9th of June, 1860, ought to be recorded in letters of gold in the annals of the town of Sarrio, for Don Rosendo, supported by Alvaro Peña, and his son Pablo, appointed the afternoon of that day to meet at the theatre for the discussion of a subject of *vital* (Don Rosendo would not for the world have omitted the word "vital") interest to the town of Sarrio and its suburbs. Only four or five of the most intimate friends of the merchant were acquainted with the noble and patriotic project which had prompted the invitation; so, drawn by curiosity as much as by courtesy, those who had been asked arrived at three o'clock precisely, and many came to the meeting who had not received an invitation. The theatre was packed quite full. The patrician townsfolk took possession of the boxes and stalls, whilst the plebeian repaired to the gallery. On the stage there was a writing table, old and dirty, and round it were placed half a dozen chairs, neither new or clean, for they served as furniture for any "poorly furnished rooms" in a play. The stage was still empty, although the theatre was full, and the whole house was almost in darkness, for what little light there was came through the dusty panes of a window at the back of the stage. In time one's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and one could distinguish the people as they entered and proceeded cautiously along the line of boxes, so as to

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avoid knocking against anybody, touching the craniums of the occupants, in their search for vacant seats.

"There is no room here, Don Rufo."

"Is there no place?" asked the medical man with the vacant smile of the blind.

"No; go up to the stage boxes."

"Come here, Don Rufo; come here," cried some one in the front.

"Is that you, Cipriano?"

And after more pushing and struggling the comer managed to get settled. One arrival, more wide-awake than the other, lighted a wax taper, but instantly there arose voices from the gallery:

"Eh, eh! Cat's eyes, Don Juan! When you go at night to Peonza's house you don't have a taper then."

Don Juan hastened to extinguish it, to avoid the insults and shouts of laughter levelled at him by the idle crowd.

As time went on the hum of conversation grew deafening. The patronizers of the gallery expressed their impatience by stamps, cries, and shouts, whilst exchanging with each other, over the heads of the occupants of the stalls, jokes and remarks which were coarse in the extreme. It was a good thing that there were no ladies present. At last four gentlemen appeared on the stage—Don Rosendo Belinchon, Alvaro Peña, Don Feliciano Gomez, and Don Rudesindo Cepeda, proprietor of the finest cider distillery. The four men took off their hats as they assembled on the stage. Silence suddenly reigned. Some of the audience—the minority—also took off their hats; the majority, more veiled in darkness, and more inclined to discourtesy, so prevalent in the gallery, remained covered. Don Rosendo and his friends smiled shamefacedly at the audience, and to over-

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come the oppressive feeling of nervousness and embarrassment, they began talking to the occupants of the front row of stalls who were within sight. Alvaro Peña, more courageous by dint of his military experience, advanced to the front of the stage, and giving an exaggeratedly familiar tone to his remarks, and aimlessly smiling like a *danseuse*, said:

"Señores, my coadjutors are as anxious as myself for all persons of note in the audience to come up here, so that they may assist us with their support, eh? and with their knowledge, eh?—in short, that they may second us in the enterprise about to be inaugurated." The harbor-master pronounced his r's very much like j's.

The modesty conveyed by this suggestion was received with a murmur of applause from the assembly.

"Is not Don Pedro Miranda here?" asked Peña, now at his ease, and resuming the despotic military air peculiar to him.

"Here he is—here!" cried several voices.

Don Pedro, however, remonstrated with those who pushed him towards the stage.

"But, señores, why? What is the object? There are other people."

But there was no help for it. He was gradually pushed to the stage, and as there were no steps by which to climb, Peña and Don Feliciano Gomez pulled him up by the hands on to the boards.

"Now, Don Rufo, come up."

Don Rufo, the chief doctor of the town, after protesting a little, was also pulled up in the same way. And by the same simple means five or six more gentlemen arrived upon the stage. Each ascent was greeted with loud applause and a murmur of delight from the friendly gathering. The officer then seeing Gabino



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Maza seated in a *fauteuil* by the wall, cried out cheerfully:

"Gabino, I did not see you! Come, man; come along."

"I am very well here," cried the huffy ex-officer of the navy, drily.

"Shall I come down for you?"

Maza returned in a loud voice:

"There is no need."

"Come, Don Gabino, go up. Don't be idle. Men like you ought to be here. There is only you now to go up!"

And at the same time they tried to push him on. But all entreaties were in vain. Maza was as determined to remain in the box as the others were that he should leave it. Then Alvaro Peña came down after him, but after a long altercation he was obliged to retire defeated.

The stage was now almost full. More chairs were brought from the actors' dressing-rooms, the most aristocratic residents of Sarrio took their seats, and then ensued a consultation to decide who was to be the chairman of the meeting. In this there seemed to be some difficulty in coming to an agreement, and the public gave signs of impatience. The majority was of opinion that the honor of sitting behind the pinewood table was due to Don Rosendo, but he declined it with a modesty much redounding to his credit. At last, however, he took the chair, as he saw the public was getting tired, and the applause was tremendous. Fresh and wearisome discussion ensued as to who was to open the meeting. Alvaro Peña, a man of impulse and action, finally took a few steps towards the curtain, and said in a loud voice:

"Gentlemen."

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"Sh! Sh! Silence!" cried several voices, and silence reigned.

"Gentlemen, the object of this meeting is no other, eh? than for us to unite in the support of the material and moral interests of Sarrio. Some days ago our most worthy president informed me that they were deteriorating, eh? and that it was necessary to support them at all costs. Gentlemen, there are many questions at issue in Sarrio at this critical time—the question of the covered market, the question of the cemetery, the question of the road to Rodillero, the question of the slaughter-house, and many others; and I said to my worthy friend, the only means of solving these problems is to call a meeting at which all the Sarrienses can freely give their opinions."

"What?" cried a sharp voice from the gallery.

Peña darted an angry look in the direction of the sound, and as he was known to be a violent man, and had great, fierce mustachios, the fellow trembled in his skin, and did not venture to make a second ejaculation.

"My good friend, whose large heart and love of progress is known to all, said to me some time ago that he was of the same opinion, and that, moreover, he had a plan that he was anxious to lay before this illustrious assembly. Therefore we have called our friends of Sarrio to a public meeting, and here we are—because we have come."

This collapse produced an excellent effect on the audience, who laughed good-naturedly.

"Señores," continued the captain, encouraged by the sound of merriment, "I believe that what this place requires is to be roused from its state of lethargy to the life of reason and progress, eh?—to rise to the height of the progress of the century, to take stock of itself and

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its powers. Hitherto Sarrio has been a town under the sway of theocracy; plenty of nones, sermons, and rosaries, and no thought of the advance of its interests and the knowledge of anything useful. We must get out of this state, eh?—we must shake off the theocratic yoke. A place governed by priests is always a backward and a squalid place.” (Laughter and applause, mingled with hisses.)

The officer spoke better at the conclusion of his speech, and even acquired a certain aplomb during his denunciation of priestcraft.

“May I be allowed to say a word?” cried a clear voice from a box.

“Who is it? Who is it?” asked the audience and the dignitaries of the stage of one another.

“It is Perinolo’s son.”

“Who?”

“Perinolo’s son. Perinolo’s son.”

These words were repeated in a low tone all over the theatre.

Perinolo’s son was a pale youth with large, prominent eyes. Nothing else was visible in the semi-darkness of the place, which was fortunate for him, for a good light would have revealed the crumpled front of his shirt and the dishevelled locks of his hair, and the holes in his boots and his threadbare trousers would have been seen through the balustrade of the box. But all the people of Sarrio knew him from meeting him constantly in the street or at the *cafés*. I must say that, in spite of his appearance, he was a lad of gentle mien and disposition.

His father, Señor Maria el Perinolo, the bootmaker in the town, was quite an institution. He was one of the few old artisans who in the middle of the century

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still retained the jacket and large hat of former times. He was a Carlist fanatic, a member of all the religious confraternities; he told his beads in the afternoon as the bell from the Church of Saint Andrew rang for prayer; accompanied by several womenfolk, he joined in the processions of Holy Week with its disciplinary garb and a crown of thorns, and he had under his care the Chapel of the Nazarene, in the Calle de Atras. This poor saint, who had never given anybody cause to speak against him (supreme testimony of honesty among the lower classes), brought up his own son, Sinforoso, and two others in the holy fear of God, and the strap, scourgings, penances on his knees, days on bread and water, ear-pullings and blows, constituted the tender memories of Sinforoso's childhood. As he grew from boyhood and youth he showed signs of having profited by his father's teaching. Perinolo made up his mind that the lad's vocation was not in the direction of boot-making, but of becoming a pillar of the Romish Church. Means were, however, wanting to send him to the seminary at Lancia, so Don Melchor de las Cuevas, Don Rudesendo, and the parish priest spontaneously came to his assistance, and allowed the lad three pesetas a day until he could intone the mass. But at the end of the second year of theology these gentlemen received from the seminarist an elegantly expressed letter in which he stated that he did not feel called by God to an ecclesiastical career, and that rather than be a bad priest he would learn his father's business, or go to America; and it ended by entreating in fervent terms that he might be allowed to exchange theology for the law, for which he had a predilection, so as to modify the disappointment of his father. His benefactors acceded to the request, and Sinforoso finally became a pillar of the

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state instead of the church, as Perinolo had wished. Whilst pursuing his studies with marks of commendation from the commencement to the close, he contributed several articles to the daily papers, by which achievement he considered himself entitled to let his hair grow and wear *pince-nez*. So that the licentiate returned to Sarrio with an aureole of glory befitting one who had won his spurs and still wages war in the press of the day. He attached himself to the most advanced Liberal party, which alienated him from his people. His father was greatly enraged with him, and it was only through his mother's intercession that he let him remain in the house. He never spoke to him or gave him a centime for his expenses, but merely let him sleep under his roof and partake of their scanty fare. At the end of a few months the youth's boots became shabby, and his clothes looked wretched; but the man of letters carried it off by the reserve and gravity of his physiognomy and the self-importance of his deportment. He spent the morning reading in bed, and the afternoon and evening in loud discussions at the *café* of what he read in the morning. The townfolk did not like him, but they respected his talents and dignity.

"Who asked permission to speak?" queried Don Rosendo.

"Suarez—Sinforoso Suarez," said the youth, bending over the rail.

"Then you have it, Señor Suarez."

The young man coughed, ran the fingers of both hands through his hair, leaving it rougher and more tumbled than ever, put on his glasses that he wore hanging by a string, and said:

"Gentlemen."

The quiet, impressive tone with which he said this

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word, the long pause that followed it, during which he fixed his glasses on his nose and looked at the audience in a superior way, inspired silence and attention.

“After the brilliant speech which has just been given us by Señor Peña, my respected friend, the illustrious harbor-master of this port—[the captain, who had never spoken to Suarez more than three times in his life, bowed graciously]—the assembly is quite convinced of the generous and patriotic feelings which prompted the promoters of this meeting. There is nothing so beautiful, nothing so grand, nothing so sublime as to see a town met together to discuss the dearest, highest interests of life. Ah, gentlemen, when listening just now to Señor Peña I imagined myself in the Agora of Athens, a free citizen, with other citizens, free as myself, discussing the destiny of my country; I imagined I heard the ardent, eloquent words of one of those great orators who adorned the Hellenic State. Why, the eloquence of my dear friend, Señor Peña, was like the overwhelming passion that characterized Demosthenes, the prince of orators, and like the fluency and elegance that distinguished the discourses of Pericles. [Pause, with his hand to his glasses.] He was bright and animated, like Cleon; deliberate and temperate, like Aristides; his intonation was quiet and precise, like that of Esquines, and his voice was pleasant to the ear, like that of Isocrates. Ah, gentlemen, I, like the eloquent orator who has preceded me on the subject, desire that the place which gave me birth may awake to the life of progress, to the life of liberty and justice. Sarrio! What sweet recollections, what ineffable happiness does this single word awaken in my soul! Here were passed the days of my childhood. Here my mind began to form. Here love made my heart palpitate for the first

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time. Elsewhere my mind has been enriched by the knowledge of science, and the grand ideas engendered by the study of law; here my soul has been nourished by the sweet and holy feelings of the hearth. Elsewhere my intelligence has been sharpened by polemics and the light of ideas; here my affections have been fostered by tender family love. Gentlemen, I will say it again, come what may, Sarrio is called to a great destiny. It has a right to be one of the first towns on the Biscayan coast, an emporium of activity and riches, by reason of the excellent position which nature has given it, as well as the integrity, industry, and the great gift of intelligence of its inhabitants."

(Bravo! Bravo! Unanimous and loud applause.)

The silence, caused more by surprise than any bad feeling, was now broken, and the "bravos" and applause continued without intermission. Never had the industrious, honest, intelligent people of Sarrio heard any one speak so fluently and eloquently before.

"That discourse was a revelation of the modern parliamentary style!" So Alvaro Peña said when the meeting was over.

The speech continued half an hour longer, amid the increasing enthusiasm of the audience, when one of the notabilities on the platform thought that his throat must be dry, and that it was time to give him a glass of *eau sucré*. The idea was communicated in an undertone to the president, who interrupted the orator with the remark:

"If Señor Suarez is fatigued, he can rest. I am going to have a glass of water sent him."

These words were received with a murmur of approval.

"I am not tired, Señor President," the orator replied gently.

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(Yes, yes ; rest. Make him rest. Let him have a glass of water. He will hurt himself. Let him have a few drops of anise.)

The audience, suddenly inspired with tender sympathy, manifested quite a maternal solicitude for Perinolo's son, who, inflated with delight, smiled on the audience and continued:

"Fatigue is fitting for valiant soldiers. Those who, like myself, are accustomed to the tribune [he had spoken a few times in the Academy of Jurisprudence in Lancia], do not easily become fatigued."

We must now say that Mechacar, a shoemaker, a neighbor, and a rival of many years' standing of Señor Jose Maria Perinolo, who had known Sinforoso from his birth, and had often given him two or three beatings with the strap, when on his return from school he annoyed him by calling him by some contemptuous nickname, was in the gallery with his hands resting on the rail, and his face, alert and attentive, on his hands. No enthusiasm shone in those eyes under the lowering brows, as in those of the others; but envy, hatred, and malice were visible on the countenance. When the honeyed words of his rival fell upon his ears he felt powerless to stand the farce, and he called out in a rage:

"Stop that rubbish, you fool!"

(Indescribable indignation of the audience. All eyes were turned to the gallery. Voices were heard saying:)

"Who is this brawler? To the prison with him! Out with the fool!"

The president asked with terrible severity:

"Are we in a civilized town, or among Hottentots?"

The question thus formulated produced a profound impression upon the audience. Suarez, slightly pale, and in an agitated voice, finally said:

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"If the meeting desire it, I am ready to sit down."

(No, no. Go on! Loud and prolonged applause for the orator.)

The indignation against the rude disturber increased to such a degree that sounds of threats were audible, and several shook their fists in the direction whence the voice had proceeded. Alvaro Peña, the Greek orator, more indignant than anybody, finally went up to the gallery and put Mechacar out of the theatre by force, amid the applause of the public.

The storm abated, the orator continued. He made a wide digression through the fields of history to prove that from the Roman conquest, when Spain was divided into citerior and ulterior Hispania, and afterwards into Tarraco, Betica and Lusitania, and so on down to the present day, the Sarrienses had on all occasions given proof of a powerful intellect, very superior to that of the people of Nieva.

Such assertions were received with great signs of approval. Then suddenly passing into the region of law, he gently touched upon branches of knowledge that are not common, particularly in Sarrio—the science of Tribonianus and Papinianus.

On arriving at a certain point he said, with a modesty that did him credit:

"What I have just observed, señor, has no scientific value whatsoever. Every boy knows it who has made the acquaintance of the pandectas."

Don Jeronimo de la Fuente, a schoolmaster of the town who had studied the modern methods of pedagogics, and knew something of Froebel and Pestalozzi, a celebrated man who had written a primer on irregular verbs and kept a telescope at his window always turned towards the heavens, now rose from his seat and said:

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"Corporal punishment has been stopped in the schools for some years."

"I did not say 'palmetas' (blows); I said pan-dectas," returned Suarez, smiling with some vexation.

Don Jeronimo was angry at having made such a mistake.

The orator continued, and finally resumed his seat, saying, like the eloquent officer who had preceded him, that Sarrio must awake to the life of progress; that it must arise from the lethargy in which it lay, and that she must take part in the struggle of ideas, which are always fruitful; and that she must let the radiant sun of civilization rise on her horizon.

"If it be true, as I have heard, that, thanks to the patriotic and generous initiative of a most worthy citizen of this town, that the Fourth Estate of modern powers is about to celebrate its advent here; if, in fact, Sarrio will be presented with a periodical which will reflect her legitimate aspirations, let it be the palladium for the exercise of her intelligence, the promoter of her dearest interests, the advanced protector of her tranquillity and peace, the organ, in short, by which it may have communion with the spiritual world. Let us congratulate ourselves with all our hearts, and let us also congratulate the illustrious patrician whose efforts will bring to us a ray of this luminous star of the nineteenth century which is called the press."

(Bravo, bravo! All eyes are turned to the chairman. The face of Don Rosendo beams with dignity and delight.)

After the son of Perinolo came Don Jeronimo de la Fuente. The illustrious professor of the instruction of youth was very anxious to rise in the eyes of the public after his slip about the pandectas. He commenced by

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saying that he shared the opinions of the worthy orator [notice that he did not say eloquent, or illustrious, but worthy, nothing more] who had preceded him on the subject; that he, destined by his profession to light the torch of science in infantile brains, could not do less than be a devoted partisan of all modern enlightenment, more especially of that of the press. In corroboration of this statement he begged to say that as soon as a periodical in Sarrio was an established fact he would have the pleasure of laying before his fellow-citizens the solution of a problem which until now was considered insoluble, that of the trisection of the angle, to which he had devoted much time and trouble, and which, fortunately, now was crowned with success. He spoke, moreover, with great emphasis on other matters—of physical geography and astronomy, clearly and briefly explaining the earth's rotation and progression, the composition of air, the formation of the clouds and dew, the origin of the salt of the sea, of springs and rivers, the scientific cause of tides, and also something about the cause of volcanoes. Afterwards, just by the way, he passed on to an explanation of the celestial mechanism, and particularly the law of universal attraction, discovered by Newton, by which planets move round the sun in elliptic orbits. Then he explained with great brilliancy the nature of an ellipsis. Finally, speaking of our satellite, the moon, he remarked that the time of its revolution round the earth was sensibly diminishing, which indicated the decrease of its orbit. This, according to the orator, would sooner or later result in the moon falling into the earth, when both would be shattered. Don Jeronimo then resumed his seat, leaving the audience quite crushed under the weight of this alarming prophecy.

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The proceedings went on until lamps were lighted. Don Rufo, the town doctor, a tall, lean man, with a pointed beard and gold eye-glasses, then got up and declared explicitly in a few words that thought was only a physiological function of the brain, and the soul an attribute of matter, and that the greater or less degree of intelligence in animals depends on the cerebral lobules and the weight of the brain. The orator computed that its weight in a man was three pounds and a half. Then he gave the calculation of the phosphoric matter that it contains. Man's brain contains more phosphorus than animals', whilst theirs have more than birds'. In children the quantity of phosphorus increases considerably at the natal hour, and it continues to increase rapidly with the course of time. But in what part of the brain is the spark of intellectual activity situated? asked the orator. In his opinion this activity has its mainspring in the grayish or bluish substance, and in some way in the whitish substance, which is the conductor of such activity. He then spoke of the dura-mater, the hemispheres of the brain, the frontal, parietal, and occipital parts of the skull, the function of the cerebrum, the seat of the cerebellum. Here the speaker conceived the happy idea of making a beautiful comparison between the circumlocutions of this gray substance and a heap of intestines thrown promiscuously together. All the faculties which we call the soul are nothing but functions of this gray substance, of this mass of intestines. The brain secretes thoughts, as the liver does bile. The orator concluded by saying that whilst humanity is ignorant of these truths it cannot rise from its present state of barbarism.

Navarro, the veterinary professor, who never wished to be behind the doctor, then asked leave to speak,



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and after a few words of congratulation on the inauguration of the "meeting" (all the speakers used the English term), he gave expression to a few very rational ideas on the gangrenous quinsy of the pig, and the treatment for its prevention. The orator hesitated, stuttered, and grew hot in the expression of his ideas, but this deficiency of language was compensated for by the novelty and interest of the subject, for numbers of these nice animals fell victims to quinsy at certain seasons in Sarrio.

In spite of the interest and respect with which the public listened to the discourse on the danger which threatened pig-farming, there were certainly signs of impatience to hear the president's speech. After the allusion of Perinolo's son to the fact of a journal, every one was anxious to have the news confirmed. Whilst Navarro was talking a voice from the gallery cried:

"Let Don Rosendo speak!"

And although this rude interruption was rebuked with a prompt "Sh!" it was evident that they had had enough of Navarro.

At last the celebrated man of Sarrio, the standard-bearer of all progress, the illustrious patrician, Don Rosendo Belinchon's majestic figure rose behind the table.

(Silence! Sh! Sh! Silence, gentlemen! Attention! A little attention, please.)

These were the cries that proceeded from the crowd, although nobody dared move a finger, such was the anxiety to hear the president's remarks.

Like all men of a really superior mind and clear intelligence, Don Rosendo wrote better than he spoke. Nevertheless, his quiet mode of speech gave an impression of dignity that was wanting in the orators who had preceded him.

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"Gentlemen (pause), I thank (pause) all the people (pause) who have assisted (pause) this afternoon (pause) at the meeting which I have had the honor to convene. (Much longer pause, rife with expectation.) I have a real pleasure (pause) in seeing gathered together in this place (pause) the most illustrious persons of the town (pause), and all those who, for one reason or another, are of consequence and importance."

(Bravo! Very good. Very good.)

After this exordium, received in such a flattering style, the orator maintained that he was moved by the desire to raise the intellectual tone of Sarrio. Then he added that the object of this meeting had only been that of raising this tone. *(Long applause.)* He considered himself too weak and incompetent to accomplish the task. *(Yes, yes. Applause.)* But he counted on—at least he thought he could count on—the support of the many men of feeling, patriotism, intelligence, and progress dwelling in Sarrio. *(Thunders of applause.)* The means that he considered most efficacious to raise Sarrio to its rightful height, and to make it compete worthily with other towns, and even maritime towns of more importance, was the creation of an organ that would support its political, moral, and material interests. "And, gentlemen (pause), although all the difficulties are not yet overcome (pause), I have the pleasure of informing this illustrious assembly *(Attention! Sh! Sh! Silence!)* that perhaps in the ensuing month of August *(Bravo! Bravo! Loud and frantic applause that interrupted the orator for some minutes)*—that perhaps in the ensuing month of August *(Bravo! Bravo! Silence!)* the town of Sarrio will have a bi-weekly paper."

(Loud applause. Navarro threw his hat upon the

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stage. *Several other spectators followed his example.*) Alvaro Peña and Don Feliciano Gomez employed themselves in picking them up and returning them to their owners. Don Rosendo's face shone with an august expression, and his lips, wreathed with a happy smile, revealed the two symmetrical rows of teeth, eloquent proof of dental skill.

"In spite of these expressions of regard (pause), for which I thank you from the bottom of my soul (pause), pride does not blind me. My want of power (*No, no. Applause.*) makes me fear that the organ about to be started may not come up to the expectations of the public. (*Voices from various sides: "Yes, it will. We are sure it will." Applause.*) But if, perhaps (pause), the lack of cleverness can be atoned for by faith and enthusiasm, it will certainly be so. My humble pen and my modest fortune are at the disposal of the town of Sarrio. (*Vehement signs of approbation.*)

"The new paper," continued the orator, "has a great mission to fulfil. This mission consists in starting the reforms and the advancement which the town requires." The necessity of these reforms and advancements is known to all the world. The covered market is absolutely indispensable; the road to Rodillero was the constant desire of both places; and as to the slaughter-house, Don Rosendo asked with surprise how the town could consent to the existence of a focus of filth like the present one, which was a perfect disgrace to the place.

Gabino from his seat had listened to the speakers with marked disdain and disgust. He turned about in his chair as if it were hurting him, and he was filled with an overwhelming desire to cry out to the orators: "Asses! Fools!" as he was accustomed to in the Club, or to slash out at them with one of his fiercest sarcasms. These

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fooleries thoroughly upset him. It was not surprising, when we recollect the state of the ex-sailor's liver. He breathed with difficulty, he ground his teeth, he smiled sarcastically, and was paralyzed with rage, thus showing his disapprobation of all that had been said, all that was being said, and all that would be said. Occasionally he gave vent to a "Bah!" or a "Pooh!" or a "Pshaw!" and other peculiar sounds not less significant. Finally, in the middle of Don Rosendo's discourse, either because his grave eloquence was incontrovertible, or because the applause exasperated him to an intolerable degree, Gabino left the place and walked up and down in front of the door of the theatre in a pitiable state of agitation. In a few minutes he returned, and then went up into the gallery. Then, hearing Don Rosendo touch upon the matter of the slaughter-house, he asked a pleb to let him pass, and arrived in the first row, he cried out excitedly, "This is not fair play."

On hearing the remark Don Rosendo stopped suddenly, dumb and pale. A loud murmur of surprise ran through the whole theatre. Some cried, "Out with him!" Others said, "Sh! Sh!" and the eyes of all, after being directed to the gallery, were turned to the chairman. Don Rosendo, quite agitated, said with a hoarse voice:

"Gentlemen, if these remarks have shown that I have had any unworthy thoughts in the convocation of this meeting, my delicacy forbids me to remain in the chair, and I retire."

("No, no! Go on! Long live the president!")

"I am sure, gentlemen," said the orator, visibly moved, "that the individual who has just called out is not a resident of Sarrio; he has not been born in Sarrio! He can't be of Sarrio!"



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Somebody having murmured that the interlocutor was of Nieva, great indignation and confusion reigned in the theatre. A formidable cry of "Down with the bullfinches! Viva Sarrio!" It must be mentioned that the people of Nieva were called bullfinches on account of the great number of these birds there, whilst the people of Sarrio are called in Nieva chaffinches for a similar reason.

The excitement having at last abated, Don Rosendo acknowledged the applause with thanks and acceded to the persuasions of the audience, and returned to his place.

"Before again occupying this seat [the president had retired to the back of the stage], I must say that if this popinjay or bullfinch (*laughter*) wants to force from me an opinion on the subject of the slaughter-house, I have no objection to giving it, because I am always straightforward. (*Great interest. You could have heard a pin drop.*) I solemnly declare, gentlemen, that in my opinion the new slaughter-house ought not to be put anywhere but on the rubbish chute."

The orator terminated his eloquent speech with a few more words, and the meeting broke up.

The audience left the theatre, half asphyxiated, as much by the many emotions experienced in a short time as by the hundred and four degrees of heat in the place.

The Story of a Tear

CHAPTER IX

THE STORY OF A TEAR

ALL this happened in exalted spheres, whilst in the obscure regions of private life events were transpiring which, albeit not so memorable, were of some importance to those concerned.

On the day following the interview already narrated between Venturita and Gonzalo, the young man did not appear at his fiancée's ; he remained at home, feigning a seize of violent toothache. Such at least was the news that reached Cecilia through Elvira, the maid, who met Don Melchor's servant on the market-place. As the young man did not appear the next day either, the family thought he was still suffering, but Venturita and Valentina were not deceived. The embroideress avoided meeting the girl's eyes, perhaps from fear of embarrassing her, or because she herself felt embarrassed without knowing why. Venturita was as merry as ever; and Cecilia, the only one anxious enough to be silent, took a toothache mixture from her wardrobe, copied out a prayer to Saint Polonia which had been given her, and calling Elvira mysteriously aside, she said with a deep blush :

"Elvira, will you be so kind as to take this bottle and paper to Señorita Gonzalo?"

"Now, at once?"

"As soon as you can. . . . If you have nothing to do just now— But I don't want it to be talked about."



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"All right, *señorita*," returned the pale little brunette, smiling kindly, "nobody shall know a word about it. Your mamma was just asking for some starch, so I will go and get some."

When Gonzalo received the little packet, he was overwhelmed with remorse, and paced up and down the room in agitation. Three or four times he was on the point of taking his hat, going to the Belinchons' house, and letting things go on as before. All the feelings of honor, kindness, and goodness inherent in him, the voice of reason which spoke for Cecilia—in one word, the good angel which every man has within him, impelled him to this course. But he could not drive the pretty, graceful image of Venturita from his mind: the fire of her eyes seemed still to pierce his soul, the sweet, voluptuous touch of her golden hair—in fact, his bad angel held him back. Gonzalo was a man of physical health, powerful muscles, rich blood, but with a weak will. Evil spirits fear delicate constitutions more than a fine one like his. The battle fought by his good and bad angels did not last long; it was soon decided in favor of the latter by means of a note from Venturita brought by the other maid of the house. It ran thus:

"Don't be impatient. To-day I will speak to mamma. Trust in me. VENTURITA."

The look of the maid as she gave this note seemed, in spite of her smile, to convey a tacit reproach, which somewhat upset him. He dismissed her with a handsome tip; and on opening the letter with a trembling hand, he noticed the sandal perfume, always used by Venturita, and as it recalled to his mind the bewitching, beautiful girl, it set chords vibrating in his being which had hitherto remained untouched. He put the

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letter to his lips, and intoxicated with passion, he kissed it effusively many times.

Poor Cecilia ! She had taken the first piece of paper that came to hand, and without waiting for perfumes, she generally wrote to her fiancé in pencil.

If women only knew the importance of these wretched details!

Venturita had been hovering about her mother all day, waiting for an opportunity of speaking privately to her. In the evening, when the needlewomen had gone, the mother and daughter were at last alone. Cecilia had retired to her room, a prey to a depression that she had tried to combat by work during the day. Doña Paula was seated in an armchair with her eyes fixed on the window, looking at the last rays of the setting sun, in a melancholy, pensive attitude unusual in her. She seemed to forebode the trouble that was coming. Venturita put the embroidery frames away in a corner, covered them over with a cloth, arranged the chairs in order and dragged the work-basket to one side so that it should not be in the way.

"Have the lights brought," said Doña Paula.

"Why," returned the girl, taking a low chair by her side. "It is all tidy now."

Her mother turned her eyes again to the window, and resumed her melancholy attitude. At the end of some minutes' silence Venturita took her parent's hand and raised it affectionately to her lips. Doña Paula turned her head with surprise. Seldom, nay never, had her youngest daughter given this respectful kiss. She smiled sweetly, and taking her by the chin, she said :

"Are you pleased with the dress?"

"Yes, mamma."

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"It makes you a very pretty figure. If it is taken in a little at the waist it will be charming."

The girl was silent, and after a minute she raised her eyes, and controlling her voice, said in a calm tone :

"I say, mamma, what do you think of Gonzalo's retreat?"

"Gonzalo's retreat!" exclaimed the señora, turning her head anxiously. "What do you mean, child?"

"Yes, his retreat, because I don't believe that he is ill; yesterday he was playing billiards at the Marina Café all the evening."

"Bah! bah! you are joking."

"I am not joking; I am serious."

"And who told you that?"

"I know it from Nieves, who was told by her brother."

"The pain probably left him in the evening, and he went out for a little change."

"Well then, why did he not come to-day?"

"Because the pain no doubt returned."

"Don't you believe it, mamma. You can be quite certain Gonzalo does not love Cecilia."

"Do you know what you are saying, child? Be so good as to hold your tongue, before you make me angry."

"I will be silent, but the proofs that he is giving of his affection are not very great."

"That I should have to hear this!" said the señora, turning round proudly. "If Gonzalo is somebody, Cecilia is as good. My daughter is not to be treated with disrespect by Gonzalo, or the Prince of Asturias, do you hear? I will inquire into the truth of what you have said, and if it be true, I will take measures."

Dofia Paula was naturally kind and gentle, a friend

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of the poor, and generous ; but she had the unreflective pride and the extreme touchiness of the working class of Sarrio.

"No, mamma, I don't mean that. Who said that Gonzalo treats Cecilia with disrespect?"

"You, yourself. Why does he not love her then?"

Venturita hesitated a moment, and then replied with firmness :

"Because he loves me."

"Come," said the señora laughing, "I ought to have seen from the first that it was all a joke."

"It is not a joke, it is pure truth, and if you want convincing you can see for yourself."

Then she drew from her bosom a letter which she had ready, and handed it to her mother; whereupon Doña Paula sprang to her feet and cried :

"Quick ! a light, quick !"

Venturita took a box of tapers that was on the table, and lighted one.

Mother and daughter were pale. The mother held the letter to the light, and after reading a few lines she dropped into an armchair, and fixing her eyes on her daughter with a sad expression, she said :

"Ventura, what have you done?"

"I? nothing," returned the girl, letting the taper, which was nearly burnt out, fall to the ground.

"Is it then nothing to you, you heartless, mad creature, to prevent the marriage of your sister, to deceive her so abominably and to give rise to such a scandal in the town as never was seen?"

"I have not done all this. He was the one to declare himself to me. Is it then a sin to be loved?"

"On this occasion, yes," replied the señora severely; "at the first sign you ought to have told me. To allow

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him to speak to you in any other way than as to a sister was treachery to your sister, and does little credit to yourself."

"Well, there it is," returned the girl in a scornful tone.

"Then it shall not be," said Doña Paula angrily, as she rose from her seat. "What do you suggest? Come, say; or rather, what have you suggested?"

"You can imagine."

"To marry each other, eh?" she asked in a sarcastic tone. "Then you are greatly mistaken! The marriage of your sister is broken off— Well, it is as good as broken off— Of course, you are free to marry Gonzalo, but don't you think you will set foot in this house. In the first place, you are a bad girl who ought to pay for your grimacings; and in any case your father and I will not consent to your marrying a man who has treated your sister so disgracefully and deceived us all round. People would indeed say that we were dying to have him for a son-in-law, so give up the idea, child."

"Well, if you like it or not," said Venturita, flouncing to the door, "I shall marry him."

Doña Paula felt inclined to punish this insolence with corporal punishment, but the girl quickly left the room and shut the door; then half reopening it, she said in furious tone:

"I will marry him; I will marry him; I will marry him."

The following day Gonzalo received a letter from Ventura in which she said:

"Yesterday I spoke to mamma, and I think she will give in. Keep your spirits up."

And in effect, that same morning mother and daughter renewed the conversation in the daughter's

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room. It was a long interview, and we do not know what transpired, but at the end of an hour Doña Paula appeared with her eyes red with weeping and her hand on her heart, from which she frequently suffered, and retiring to her room she went to bed. Ventura came out behind her, quiet but pale, and calling Generosa, her confidential maid, she gave her a letter for Gonzalo, who that evening appeared at nine o'clock in front of Belinchon's house. A few minutes later, Venturita opened the window of the library, which was on the ground floor and protected with iron gratings.

"Everything is settled," she said in a falsetto voice, directly the young man approached.

"How? Really?" he asked in a tone of delight.

"It has been a pretty hard task for me! She was furious."

"And your papa?"

"Papa knows nothing about it yet, but he will give in, too. See if he won't give in. The measure taken could not have been more effectual."

"What measure?"

"The one I took. The whole business looked so hopeless that it would have ended by your being forbidden the house, and I should have been packed off to Tejada in disgrace. All entreaties, all arguments were in vain; she was mad with rage, she called you an infamous traitor, you can imagine how she spoke of me! Then I saw that there was nothing for it but to take a strong measure; and it was somewhat strong," she added in a low, changed voice.

"What measure?" asked Gonzalo with curiosity.

Venturita was silent for some moments, and then somewhat shamefacedly returned:

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"I told her—I told her that there was nothing else for us but to marry each other."

"Why?"

"Why—why—guess why!" said the girl with impatience.

Then Gonzalo divined what she meant, and the knowledge filled him with repugnance and terror. A gloomy silence fell upon him, and Venturita at last said:

"Do you think it was wrong?"

"Yes," he returned drily.

"All right, my boy; to-morrow I will tell her it was all a lie, and then all is over between us."

"That won't do any good. I do not quarrel with the result, as you must know, but with the way you have managed it."

"I lose more than you."

"Well, I feel it all the same."

"All right, then show it," she returned in a pet, jumping up from the window-sill, where she had been seated.

But Gonzalo put his hand through the bars, and caught her by the dress.

"Stop."

The dress tore.

"Now you have torn my frock, do you see?"

"Well, don't go so quickly."

And succeeding in catching her by the arm, he obliged her to sit down again.

"What rough manners!" exclaimed the girl laughing; "that must be the way bears make love."

"Do you love me?" asked Gonzalo, also laughing.

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"Give me your hand as a friend."

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The girl gave him her pink and white hand, and the herculean youth kissed it passionately several times.

"*Au revoir* till to-morrow, and I will tell you all the news—" she said, once more rising from her seat.

Gonzalo withdrew, and after taking a few steps he recollected that the news signified the way in which Cecilia would take his disloyal conduct, and his forehead corrugated with an expression of pain. In this state of preoccupation he crossed the Rua Nueva, entered the Plaza de la Marina, went along by the harbor, and reached the end of the mole. The night was mild and clear. The stars shining in the firmament were reflected in the tranquil waters of the bay. The rigging of the anchored shipping stood out distinctly from the dark blue background. The hour for the extinction of lights had not yet struck, and one could see several lights and figures on the ships; the sailors reclining on the upper decks were chatting before retiring to rest.

Occasionally a glance would be cast at a great English steamer anchored in the middle of the harbor, and a sailor would call out, with an exaggeration of the pronunciation :

"*All right,*" and a schooner would echo the words, "*All right,*" and the cry would be taken up by all the tenders, schooners, and fishing smacks. It was a joke upon the English anchored there. But it was received with silence; the great steamer treated it with the phlegmatic, profound contempt that nobody can assume better than a son of Albion.

The end of the mole was the resort of anybody who wished to enjoy the fresh air. It was one of the hottest nights of August. Gonzalo, overwhelmed by the heat and the difficulty of his position, walked along with his hat in his hand. Before reaching the end of

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the mole he caught sight of a gigantic figure on the second stage.

"I say, uncle," he cried.

The old sailor spent the greater part of his life on that mole in intimate communion with the sea, his old friend and companion. The terrible ocean was an open book to him, either sleeping in its immense bed of sand or awakening and lashing the sky furiously with its foam. He could accurately forecast its rages, its storms, its smiles, and its profoundest working. To him the monster seemed to reveal its liquid heart as to a faithful friend, and told him how it fretted in its granite prison, and how the sight of human wickedness sometimes made it long to rush over the land and submerge this fulsome human anthill. And the good man, thinking of all the crimes about which he had read, would reply:

"You are right, friend; in your place it is probable I should feel the same."

Nothing in the world would have induced Don Melchor to forego his morning, afternoon, and evening walks at the end of the mole. During his wife's lifetime, when he was under surveillance, he had to his great vexation been obliged to give up the later walks. But now unfortunately, as he had no one to look after him and keep him in hand, he did as he liked.

Nothing came up to the sea-air cure for catarrhs. When occasionally he had a pain in his inside, he drank a couple of glasses of salt water and he was all right. There is no better or simpler medicine than sea-water. Once he had a bad leg: two ulcers corroded the flesh down to the bone; and the doctors not only gave the leg up for lost, but despaired of his life. In desperation he had himself carried down to the beach and

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bathed. After nine baths the ulcers were cured. One can imagine what he thought of the curative efficacy of the sea after that !

On the other hand, he had a great objection to rivers. The air of a river made him hoarse, the fogs suffocated him, and gave him asthma. The "shut in" feeling of the air filled him with aversion and unspeakable dislike. Don Melchor slept little ; he rose before sunrise ; and directly he got up he ascended his observatory, and examined the sky and the sea ; and after drawing out in his head a meteorological map of the coming day, he went down to the end of the mole to corroborate his observations ; ascertained whether the wind was passing, or settled, if it were positively north, or inclined to the east or west, if the weather were going to be good or bad, if the sea would be stormy or calm ; how long the weather would remain as it was ; to what quarter the wind would veer at mid-day ; if the sea would then be calm or rough, etc., etc.

He could not take his chocolate until he had made all these observations.

And really, however this may look like a mania, I think it is less silly than rising from one's bed to notice if one's neighbor's face is clean or dirty, cheerful or sad, if he eats or if he fasts, if he sleeps or if he wakes, if he be idle or industrious, how long he remains at home, and what road he takes when he goes out. Gonzalo mounted the upper wall with an irresistible desire to unburden his heart and tell his uncle what had happened, for although his character was little adapted for love confidences, the occasion was important and critical. Don Melchor, who walked a little bent under the weight of years, straightened himself at the sight of a man approaching, for he was anxious to hide all signs

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of weakness from the world, and he liked to be thought a stalwart fellow.

"Is that you, Gonzalillo?"

"It is I, uncle."

"That is a wonder! For you like seeing billiard balls roll better than waves."

"No; I have not played billiards to-day. But I am worried and upset, and I want to speak to you about an important matter, in fact I want your advice."

Don Melchor looked at him in surprise.

"An important matter?"

"Yes—look here, uncle; would you marry a woman you did not love?"

"What a question! Matrimony at my age is a thing of the past, my boy."

"But if you were young, would you marry like that?"

"Never."

"Very well, uncle—I do not love Cecilia."

"You do not love Cecilia?" exclaimed the old gentleman in horror.

It must be said that Don Melchor had a blind affection, almost adoration, for his nephew's fiancée—the girl was sacred to him. From the time that he knew Gonzalo's affections were set in that quarter he inspected her as carefully as if he were examining the hulk of a ship before masting her. He had considered her kind, quiet, intelligent, and capable, and his delight at the marriage was only embittered by hearing that the engaged couple was not going to live with him.

He seldom visited Belinchon's house, but when he met the girl in the street he made a point of stopping her and treating her with exceptional courtesy and attention.

"You do not love her?" he repeated. "And why don't you love her, you dunderhead?"

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"I don't know. I have made superhuman efforts to love her, and I have not succeeded."

"And you have just found that out—a month before your marriage? Come, Gonzalo, you have got a screw loose."

"It is shameful—I grant it—but I can't resign myself to being unhappy for life."

"Unhappy! And you call it unhappiness, you great fool, to marry the nicest and prettiest girl in Sarrio, for no other can hold a candle to her."

Gonzalo could not forbear smiling.

"Cecilia is a good girl, and worthy of marrying a better man than I am, but pretty, uncle——"

"Pretty, yes, pretty, you fool!" exclaimed the Señor de las Cuevas in a rage; "you would find fault with an angel."

Surprising as the statement may be, the old man was at that time of life when one is more impressed by the poetry of womanhood, seen in exquisite sensibility, resignation, sweetness and self-sacrifice, than by the ephemeral physical charms before which impetuous youth is so prone to fall captive.

"Do not let us quarrel about it."

"But we will quarrel about it—I won't have Cecilia spoken of like that—so there!"

"All right; then I'll say that Cecilia is a very pretty girl—but——"

"But what?"

"But I cannot love her, because I love another."

"What thousand deviltries are you saying now, boy?" returned Don Melchor, taking his nephew by the arm and shaking him.

"I cannot help it, uncle. I am madly in love with her sister, Venturita."

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"Are you in your senses or out of them, you mad-man?"

"I am speaking seriously—I love her, and she loves me."

"And you think that this is all there is to be said?" said the old man, getting more and more angry. "Do you think a solemn promise can be broken in that way? Do you think a girl can be made the laughing stock of a place like that? Do you think any parents will tolerate such infamous conduct?"

"Uncle," returned Gonzalo quietly, "before daring to tell you this, things have occurred which have made me take this step. My position with Venturita is an established fact; her mother knows it, and has authorized it, and by this time her father has also been made acquainted with the circumstances."

"And will give his consent?"

"I am sure he will."

Don Melchor dropped his nephew's arm, and raised his hand to his forehead. It was some time before he could speak. At last he said in slow and melancholy tones:

"All right. I am powerless to prevent this disgrace—for it is a disgrace," he added forcibly. "You are of age, and even if you were not I would have nothing to do with such a business."

"Are you angry?"

"There is no use being angry. I am only very sorry. I am sorry for her, for I am very fond of her—and I am still more sorry for you, Gonzalo. God cannot help the man who breaks his word. You were on a safe ship, well built of white, well-seasoned wood, with the flats well lined, straight strong masts, and bright and smart rigging; and you leave that to embark in a craft that is

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prettier and showier. You are making a fine experiment, but take heed, lad, the journey is long, the sea wide and wild; when all the calm and beauty of the present becomes a scene of storm, when the soft winds rise to a hurricane, matters become serious, and pretty decorations and designs are of no avail where timber—good strong timber, is required. Give me good timber and I will take you for miles. It is not much good for a ship to leave a port well dressed if her hulk is not equal to her get up. You know that I liked Cecilia—I am very sorry that I cannot say the same of her sister. And this is not speaking against her; I do not know her well enough to do that, neither do I feel inclined to, but I can and I ought to tell you my sentiments although you disregard them.”

“Oh, uncle!”

“It does not matter, my boy; when a lad’s mind is set upon anything, full sail must be set and he must go before the wind. Everything looks shipshape—but foul weather comes, and I tell you, you are not navigating your ship well, you are not behaving like a gentleman.”

“Uncle!”

“The facts speak for themselves. Even if you have got over her parents, and overcome all difficulties, you can’t make black white, and make a bad action good. Heave the anchor and unfurl the sails. I am old, and I hope I shall not live to see the storms overtake you. But if it be God’s will to punish me thus, if for my sins I have to see you shipping water with bare masts, I shall feel, my boy, that it is beyond my power to help you.”

At these last words the voice of the old man shook; Gonzalo’s heart-strings tightened. For some time they were both silent; and then Don Melchor said:

“Come along to supper, Gonzalito.”

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"I am not hungry now," returned the young man, "but I will come presently."

"Very well. *Au revoir*," said the Señor de las Cuevas sadly, and turning his steps shoreward, he was gradually lost in the gloom.

Gonzalo remained where he was, with his eyes fixed on the wall of the mole, against which the sea was quietly washing. The waves after breaking against the stone wall with a soft, hollow murmur, receded with a sharp sound like that of curtain rings being drawn. The phosphoric brilliance of the foam proved the presence of the millions of beings existing as comfortably in the watery depths as we do on the dry land in spite of their wild career through space. The monster slept under the dark mantle of night quietly and peacefully, as a child undisturbed by bad dreams. The soft sough of its respiration was hardly audible in the hollows of the rocks.

The black silhouette of Cape San Lorenzo stretched far out to sea on the west where the revolving white, green, and red lights of the lighthouse at the point were visible. The stars were shining in the firmament with wondrous power. Jupiter blazed in the heavens like the god of night piercing the darkness with its golden rays. Suddenly a change came over the scene. The pale crescent of the moon raised its horn in the east over the tranquil water, and irradiated it with a track of light. Lucifer paled before the serene splendor of the goddess, whose slow and majestic ascent eclipsed the brilliance of the starry orbs of every size about her. She rose in a radiant splendid atmosphere emitting, diffusing, and disseminating the ambient soft influence of her wondrous presence. And the ocean, ebbing and flowing since the beginning of the world under this same influence, now kindles like a flame of fire ; its vast shin-

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ing bosom trembles, and it dashes its waters over the rocks of Santa Maria like enormous stratus of mercury, which in their retreat mingle with the incoming waves.

Sublime silence reigned, and a sense of ineffable peace pervaded the scene so old, and yet so new. Nature herself seemed to stop and listen to the eternal harmony of the heavens. The waves softly kissed each other without daring to interrupt the august serenity of the night with any louder sounds.

In spite of the great uneasiness which the conversation with his uncle had caused him, Gonzalo felt the fascination of the sea, the sky, and the moon, and his uneasiness changed to sadness. The severe words of the old sailor had suddenly awakened his conscience, and the struggle between his good and bad angel re-commenced. For one moment his good angel nearly conquered. The young man thought he would go to the Belinchons' house, speak to Doña Paula and beg her to say nothing to Cecilia, but hurry on the marriage. However, at that moment Venturita's image came before his mind, and he felt it would be impossible to live near her without suffering horribly. Then, as it nearly always happens in these struggles, there came a sense of the unendurable. "The best thing to do," he said, "will be to go right away. I will return to France or England, and not marry either. Then there will be no treachery. The injury I have done Cecilia will soon be forgotten. She will find a more worthy husband than I, and when I return at the expiration of a few years I shall probably find her happy, and surrounded with children. But—but to leave Ventura! to leave that being, radiant with happiness! No more to hear that voice that fills my soul with delight! nor to feel the sweet touch of her hand,

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fresh and soft as a rosebud ! To leave her shining eyes and magnetic smile !—oh no ! ”

Drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead. Mortal anguish filled him at the thought of separation, and to overcome the sense of it being definitely settled he said to himself : “ We’ll see, we’ll see. It would be very difficult to go back now—almost impossible. The mother knows about it now. Don Rosendo too, and probably Cecilia also by this time.”

The good angel loosened his hold and let go his hands as, spent and defeated, he gave up the struggle. If not with the eyes of the body, Gonzalo could see with those of the spirit, the white form of the good angel passing through the serene atmosphere, and vanishing on the glistening waters.

Then overwhelmed with a strange sadness, he wept. This kind of struggle can never take place in the human soul without upsetting it for some time. To win happiness he had to wound the heart of an innocent girl, break a promise, and be a traitor. .

The words of his uncle still echoed in his ears, “ God cannot help the man who breaks his word.” And, in fact, he felt himself unworthy of help. A cruel indefinite presentiment of misery, death, and sadness overwhelmed him ; and in one moment the awfulness of life without virtue or peace was revealed to him, as to the youth of the legend who embraced a beautiful young woman, and when the light oscillated with the wind, he saw that she was transformed into a hideous, hag-like, bony being.

The waves softly washed the wall at his feet, and with his eyes fixed upon them he abstractedly followed their undulating motion. The seaweed growing in the depths moved with the motion of the water like the hair of a

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dead person. How quietly he could sleep down there ! What peace in those transparent depths ! What magic light below ! Gonzalo gave ear for the first time in his life to the eloquent voice of Nature inviting him to repose in her maternal bosom—the siren voice sweet with irresistible charm, audible to unhappy creatures, even in their dreams, and so often leading them to place the cold muzzle of a pistol to their temples. It was for one minute, not more. His cheerful, sanguine temperament rebelled against this depression ; his vitality, exuberant in his healthy constitution, indignantly repudiated the passing thought of death. An insignificant incident, the appearance of a little green light in the distant horizon, sufficed to divert his attention from these gloomy ideas.

“A ship coming in,” he said. “What time is it ?” (He drew out his watch.) “Half past ten, already ! If it were a little earlier I would stop. I’ll go and see if there’s anybody at the café, for I should like a game of chapo.”

He then took out a fine Havana cigar from his case, and smoking it with gusto he repaired to the Café de la Marina.

Almost at the same time a sad scene was being enacted in the Belinchon household. Doña Paula had remained all that day in bed, a prey to a dreadful pain in the left side, which caused her great difficulty in breathing. With the plebeian’s invincible antipathy, nay terror, of science, she did not like to have a doctor, but she prescribed for herself some of the numerous remedies recommended by the many medicine women who came daily to her house to extort money from her with their vile, exaggerated adulations. So there was no end of embrocations of meat fat, cups of herb concoctions, the



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inside of fowls, etc., etc. At last, by dint of these formidable therapeutics, the good lady improved in the even-
ing enough to wish to get up ; but Cecilia and Pablito would not hear of it. Both of them had sat with her for some time at her bedside; Cecilia especially had only left her long enough to make the embrocations and tisanes. Pablito made frequent excursions into the corridors, where, curiously enough, he nearly always met Nieves, from whom he extorted toll tax. Sometimes their suppressed laughter reached the room of the invalid, and she would smile kindly, and say to Cecilia :

“ What silly creatures ! ”

For it never occurred to her that her adored son could be up to anything but hide-and-seek.

As the pain gradually left her, her mind was oppressed with the thought of telling her daughter the sad news which had made her so ill. She could only cast long and melancholy glances at the girl as she drew deep sighs of distress. She said several times :

“ Cecilia, listen.”

And each time she stopped, and merely asked for some trifle.

Night closed in. Venturita lighted the shaded lamp, and then withdrew. Pablo, finding his mother better, and seeing no further opportunity of exercising his seignioral rights in the passage, withdrew to the café. Mother and daughter remained in the bedroom, the former in bed and seemingly tranquil, the latter seated near her. After a long silence, during which the Señora de Belinchon turned over in her head a thousand ways of opening a conversation which might lead naturally to the confidence she was obliged to make, she said :

“ Have the girls worked well to-day ? ”

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"I don't know, I have scarcely seen them," returned Cecilia.

"I think that if they go on at this rate they will finish too soon."

"Perhaps so."

Dofia Paula was at a loss to know how to proceed, and remained silent.

At the end of some minutes she took up the thread afresh.

"The trousseau will be completely finished in this month of August, and I do not think you will be married for some months."

"Some months?"

"I think so. I believe Gonzalo does not wish the day to be so soon," said the señora with a trembling voice.

"Has he told you so?"

"Yes, he has told me so—I mean—no, he has not told me so—but I have guessed it from certain things—from some indirect remarks."

Dofia Paula was here overpowered with a feeling of suffocation. Fortunately Cecilia could not see the flaming color of her cheeks.

"I should like to know what those remarks were," returned the girl in a firm voice.

"Don't ask me, child of my soul!" exclaimed the señora, bursting into tears.

Cecilia turned deadly pale, and let her mother kiss the hand she held in hers, astonished at this emotion.

"What has happened, mamma?—speak."

"A terrible thing—my heart—an infamous thing—I would rather die this moment than see the ruin and the misery of one of my daughters."

"Calm yourself, mamma, you are ill, and you will do yourself great harm with this excitement."



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"What does it matter ! I tell you I would rather die—I would give my life for you not to love Gonzalo—You do love him, dear heart? You love him deeply?"

Cecilia did not reply.

"Tell me, for God's sake, that you do not love him."

Cecilia was still silent ; at the end of some minutes, trying in vain to give a firm tone to her voice, she said :

"Gonzalo declines to marry me, eh?"

Dofia Paula was now silent in her turn, and hid her weeping face in her hands.

Some minutes went by.

"Has he anything against me?"

"What could he have? Who could have anything against you, my lamb?"

"Then, if I do not please him, or he does not love me, what is to be done? It is better to be undeceived in time."

"Oh!" cried Dofia Paula, breaking into fresh sobs, for under the apparent resignation of her daughter she detected a profound grief which she strove in vain to hide.

"What is to be done, mamma? Is it not better for him to say so now than after we are married? Do I not know what a wretched life he would lead united to a woman he did not love? The pain that he causes me now, great as it is, is nothing to what I should feel if my husband did not love me. The pain would get worse and worse until I died, whilst now it may go, or at least be alleviated— Perhaps when he has gone away and I have not seen him for some time I shall gradually forget him——"

"But he is not going," returned the seffiora in confusion.

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"If he does not go, patience—I will try not to go out, and I shall not see him."

"But, child of my soul, your misfortune is much greater! Gonzalo is in love with your sister."

Cecilia turned still paler, her face became livid, and she was silent.

Her mother again kissed her hand with effusion, and then drew her to her, and covered her face with kisses.

"Forgive me for torturing you like this. Much as you suffer, I suffer more. Yesterday evening your sister came and told me. Imagine my distress and grief. My first impulse was to kill her, for I was sure that she was most to blame. She gave me proof that they have been carrying on for some time, and showed me letters which made Gonzalo's faithlessness very clear to me. When I was convinced of his treachery I said that I would have nobody make a laughing stock of my daughter, and Gonzalo should not set foot again in this house, that he was as bad as she; in short, I said all that came into my head. But this morning, this morning—I learned something still worse. I learned that your sister has gone farther than I can, or wish to, say. There is nothing for them but marriage, and that as soon as possible. Now you know why I have had this pain, which all but kills me, and would that it did so! Your father and I are both trapped—our hands are tied. If it were not so I would sooner be cut into little pieces than consent to this marriage. The infamous way this man has treated you will make me hate him all my life. Yes, all my life!" she added in an angry tone.

Cecilia did not answer. She sat with her hands clasped in her lap, her head hanging on her bosom and her horror-struck eyes fixed on the ground.

Neither the vehement broken utterances of her mother

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nor the sobs which succeeded them made her change her position. She remained thus for some time, motionless, and white as a statue.

In those large, limpid eyes there at last trembled a tear; it grew, it moved, then overflowing, it left a wet track upon her wan cheek, and fell like a drop of fire upon her hand, and there remained. A little later it evaporated. An angel had gathered it up and taken it to God in protest for her who had shed it.

“The Light of Sarrio”

CHAPTER X

GLORIOUS APPEARANCE OF “THE LIGHT OF SARRIO”

A NEW bright day dawned upon Sarrio after the recent heavy gloom. By the mercy and grace of God the beautiful town was now, when least expected, provided with a press organ, which was to be bi-weekly, or as the illustrious organizer expressed it, “hepdomenal.” Grave obstacles and perilous difficulties were at first opposed to the realization of the undertaking, but the genius of the wonderful man who undertook it overcame them all. The first difficulty was that of money. Fifty shares of a thousand ducats each were issued for the support of the periodical. The friends of Don Rosendo only took up nine. Don Rudesindo had five allotted to him, Don Feliciano two, and Don Pedro Miranda, in spite of his large income, only another two—no more. Alvaro Peña, Don Rufo Navarro, etc., excused themselves for want of funds, and that with reason; besides, they gave the business the benefit of their brains, which no doubt was a great thing. So Don Rosendo, with a generosity which greatly impressed the rest of the company, was the holder of the remaining forty-one shares.

Messengers were despatched to Lancia in search of a printing press, but the negotiations proving fruitless, the press organizer went himself to the town. At the end of some days he was fortunate enough to find a printer who had been ruined for some years, and no purchaser had been forthcoming for his broken-down, rotting apparatus which lay covered with dust in a dark cellar.

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When Don Rosendo proceeded to examine it with its owner, he could not help feeling respectful emotion, and grave thoughts filled his mind as he contemplated it.

"Here," he said, "is lying in idleness the most influential instrument of human progress, and this not from any fault of the owner, but through the desertion of mankind. How much information, how much spiritual food might it not have produced during these barren dumb years! Whilst barbarism and ignorance are rampant in the greater part of our country, that printing apparatus, the only agent of their dispersion, stands motionless for the want of a hand to work it and to bring forth from it the secrets of science and politics."

He almost kissed and fondled the machine in his enthusiasm. The printer, seeing his visitor so well disposed in its favor, could not be outdone, and he declared himself so devotedly attached to the very skeleton of his machine that he would not part with it for any money, for it had always been the faithful companion, by which he had earned his bread (and according to report, his wine too). He descanted upon its perfections with as much enthusiasm as if he were its offspring and indebted to it for his life's breath; and he moreover made the solemn statement that it printed better and cleaner than all the printing presses of the day. Hearing these facts Don Rosendo fully concurred in the exordium on the machine, and tried to prove to him that he ought to part with it to prevent its wondrous qualities being lost to the world. But the more eloquent the merchant grew, the more tender and clinging became the printer. Finally, seeing there was no persuading the man to part with his treasure, and he had not the heart to enforce it, he arranged for him to go to Sarrio with it, and settle down there. He was to take a few

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compositors with him, who were to teach the trade to some of the lads in the town, and he was to be furnished with all necessary materials for the establishment of a printing office. Folgueras, the ruined printer, was thus to be the director and master of the concern, and his salary was to be drawn from the journal, and according to our calculations this proved to be twice as much as what is given in the best printing offices in Madrid. However, it is not much if we consider the merit of the machine and the deep love professed for it by the owner.

The title of the newspaper was one of the points in which the inventive, superior mind of Don Rosendo particularly distinguished itself. It was called “The Light of Sarrio,” a name extremely impressive and well-sounding, and moreover testifying to its mission, which its founder wished to be that of enlightening and dignifying the town of Sarrio. He secretly ordered from Madrid an engraving for the head of the paper, and on its arrival a few days later it caused rapturous delight among the shareholders and all those who had the good fortune to see it. It represented a seaport, like Sarrio, in the dark hours of the night—to judge by the black hue of the sky and sea; on the left towered the heights of an ideal mountain, upon which was seen a man, bearing a distant resemblance to Don Rosendo, turning the rays of an enormous lantern upon the town; round about him were the heads of several people, and the shareholders believed in good faith that they represented themselves, and so they felt deeply indebted to the designer.

The printing press was to be set up in a storehouse of Don Rudesindo's, to whom, of course, a rent was to be paid; and at the printing office there was to be another room, but these plans required some consideration before they could be carried out. The printing press was

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finally set up, but not without heavy, unexpected expenses, for Folgueras, who pretended he was furnished with all that was necessary, had nothing at all, and they had to send to Madrid for sets of type, have type galleys made, buy tables, etc., etc. At last everything was in order. Don Rosendo worked like a slave, and busied himself with the smallest details, and his talent of organizer was more shown than ever on this occasion. He made Sinforoso Suarez chief editor with a salary of twenty-five crowns a month, and he made Don Rufo's eldest son manager. But the paper for printing did not come. They had telegraphed to Madrid for a supply and it had not arrived. The impatience of Belinchon knew no bounds. Telegrams went and came by the electric wires. They said it was detained at Lancia—a telegram to Lancia asking for it. Then they heard it had not left Valladolid—telegram to Valladolid. Then that it had not left Madrid—telegram to Madrid. Don Rosendo swore he would have no more paper from Madrid, but that he would order it henceforth from Belgium. But disappointment changed into delight, as it often does, when the news came that several bales had arrived at Lancia, and were there awaiting a cart to take them to their destination. As the copy for the first number had been ready for some days, the printing was immediately proceeded with, and it had to be done on an extensive scale, for Don Rosendo intended to circulate it through the provinces, to send it all over Spain, and even to introduce it into foreign countries. Both he and his partners took a personal interest in seeing the printing press started, and they never wearied of admiring its complicated machinery, the wonderful precision of its movement, and the marvellous velocity with which it worked, for it cast off no less than two hundred copies in

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one hour. Its illustrious founder could not restrain the press ardor which consumed him ; he tore off his coat in the presence of everybody, and literally put his shoulder to the wheel until the sweat poured copiously from his manly brow. A striking instance of enthusiasm and love of civilization to which we like to draw the attention of the rising generation ! At last “The Light of Sarrio” appeared in great style, for its founder had seen that the paper was good, and it was fairly well printed. The only faulty feature was the engraving on the frontispiece, for the majority of the people thought that the individual holding a lantern in his hand was a negro, instead of the respectable individual we have mentioned. It contained a leading article in large type called “Our Purports.” Although it was signed by the staff, it emanated entirely from the pen of Don Rosendo. The purport of the appearance of “The Light” in the press was, chiefly to defend cap-a-pie the moral and material interests of Sarrio, to combat ignorance in all its forms, and in the fierce battles of the press to fight unwearyingly for the triumph of the reforms that the progress of the times requires.

“The Light” maintained that the hour had struck for breaking with the doctrines of the past. Sarrio earnestly desired to emancipate itself from the thralldom of pettiness and conventionality; it wished to break the bonds which had hitherto restrained it, and enter into full possession of its own conscience and rights.

“We trust,” said the writer, “that a period of moral and material activity will date from the appearance of our publication, and that we shall assist at one of those social reformations which mark an epoch in the annals of the town. If our voice is successful in awakening the town of Sarrio from its long sleep and

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apathy and we soon see the dawn of an era of labor and study befitting the reform movement that we hope to inaugurate, we shall feel amply repaid for our efforts and sacrifices."

The language could not have been more noble and patriotic, and modesty, as usual, tempered the tone of the authoritative eloquence.

"We do not aspire," he said, "to being the vanguard in this great battle of thought about to take place in the town of Sarrio, but we do aspire to fighting like common soldiers, for we do expect a place in the rearguard. There we shall fight like good men, and if we finally fall vanquished, we will envelop ourselves in the sacred banner of progress."

The military allegorical style was very effective in the town, and it contributed not a little to the enthusiastic reception accorded to the paper.

In short, the article was so rich in expression, so replete with deep remarks, and the style was so concise, that the public was at a loss to attribute it to any one but the illustrious director—and in this it was right.

Then the periodical contained a long article by Sinforoso on "Woman." It consisted of two close columns of poetic prose, embroidered with all the flowers of rhetoric, describing the sweet influence of this half of the human race.

He maintained, in fervent language, that civilization cannot exist apart from matrimony; conjugal love is its only basis. Everything is holy, everything is beautiful, everything is happy in the intimate union of a young married couple. The man, rendered happy by his companion, feels his faculties increase, and is capable of carrying out enterprises otherwise impossible to him. The influence of the woman presses him onward to virtue

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and glory ; it is the sweetest and at the same time the most powerful of social forces. Sinforoso queried with surprise, “How could some beings consider woman inferior to man? She with her beauty, delicacy, grace, sweetness, perspicacity, and patience is the highest work of creation. But the mission of woman is to be a wife and mother. Without being these she is not fully evolved, she fades like a flower without perfume.” The writer concluded by advising woman to bear this in mind, and for no earthly consideration to consent to be voluntarily deprived of the two conditions of her honor and glory.

This exordium on matrimony, although addressed to the fair sex in general, was written for the special edification of a certain pretty cigarette maker, of the Calle de Caborana, whom Sinforoso had courted in vain for some years. The public thought that the girl would end by accepting him, partly by reason of the poetic terms in which he made his case clear, and partly because of the fifty reales a month which the suitor now received for his work on the staff.

Then followed a contribution from the professor, Don Jeronimo de la Fuente ; it was a serious, violent attack on Kepler’s three great laws of the motions of the planetary bodies, or rather on two of them, for he preserved silence on the first, which treats of the elliptical orbit of the planets. He fiercely opposed the second, maintaining and demonstrating by means of a most brilliant calculation that the areas described by the radius vector are not in any equal to the time employed in making them, but they concord with the attractive or repulsive force of the celestial bodies. But the chief object of his attack was the third law, for Don Jeronimo rejected as antiquated and absurd the idea that the time taken for



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the revolutions of planets was proportionate to the cubic feet of their distances from each other ; for he showed not merely by empty words, but by figures, that there was no ground for such a calculation. He announced another article for the next number, which was to establish a new basis for the celestial mechanism which would quite smash up the old one. In it he maintained that the stars were attracted by one pole and repelled by another like electric bodies, and upon this great principle he satisfactorily explained the movements of the celestial bodies, their disturbances, and many problems which had hitherto been deemed insoluble. Thanks to the telescope in the window of his house, Don Jeronimo had made a series of prodigious discoveries which set at naught all the existing knowledge of astronomy. It was not astonishing that the learned professor, filled with legitimate pride, exclaimed at the end of his article :

“Down with Kepler, Newton, Laplace, and Galileo from the pedestal upon which man’s ignorance has placed them and all colossal standard bearers of false science! All their calculations have vanished like smoke, and their magnificent systems are like dry leaves, fallen from the tree of science to rot and decay.”

Some verses by Periquito, the son of Don Pedro Miranda, were also inserted that confided to a certain mysterious “G” that he was a worm, and she a star ; he a branch, and she a tree ; she a rose, and he a caterpillar ; she a light, and he the shadow ; she the snow, and he the mud, etc.

There were reasons for suspecting that this “G” was a certain Gumersinda, the wife of a corn merchant, a woman remarkable for her stout figure, which caused her some difficulty in walking. Periquito had a particular fancy for ladies who were plump and married. When

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both these qualities were combined in one being his passion knew no bounds. And such was the present case. One must not think by this that the young man was a vicious creature. The husbands of Sarrio were not disturbed about him. Periquito was always in love, sometimes with one, sometimes with another lady, but he never dared to address them or send a billet doux. Such courses were not in his line, which consisted chiefly in fascinating them by his gaze. Therefore, whenever he came across one of these fair creatures at church, or in the theatre, he first managed to take a seat at a convenient distance, and once he had taken up his position, he directed the magnetic power of his eyes straight at the passive object of his experiment until she occasionally glanced at him with an expression of surprise. The respectable matron, often not considering herself worthy of such particular attention, would look round and ask those with her if she had a spot on her face, or if her hair were out of order. Periquito was indefatigable, and went through all these performances with the gravity they deserved. Sometimes he spent an hour or more with his eyes fixed on one person, and often when the hour had elapsed, and the enamored youth thought his soul must have filtered through the pores of the obese lady to the affection of all her faculties and feelings, this same lady would say in an undertone to her companions :

“Goodness, how that fellow Don Pedro does stare!”

How far the poet was from supposing that the star of his dreams held him in such small account !

Sometimes, but very seldom, Periquito got a little farther. When he was quite sure that the husband was not at home, nor even about the town, he sent the mysterious lady a bouquet of flowers which was really a



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passionate eloquent letter, if the lady had only been as well versed as he was in the language of flowers. Unfortunately, the supine ignorance of the fair sex in Sarrio made these ingenious modes of communication null and void. The same can be said of certain other delicate attentions to which Periquito resorted to show his devotion. If he saw the lady wear a blue dress, he donned a cravat of the same color, a blue striped shirt and a blue flower in his button-hole ; and if the lady continued wearing the same dress, he went as far as to adopt blue trousers ; and if the color were green, brown, or gray, he also followed suit. If the unhappy lady were of a religious turn of mind, Periquito voluntarily imposed on himself the terrible ordeal of rising early, and attending the mass to which she went ; and if on Saturday, Monday, or Thursday she approached the sacred table to communicate, he also received the spiritual food from the priest on the same days. If the lady had plants in her window, Periquito promptly ascertained her hour of watering them, and took care to pass by at that time, when he was in the seventh heaven if perchance a few drops fell from the watering-pot on his hat. In the small hours of the night he wandered around the house, making invocations to the moon, and praying it might watch over the dreams of his love. On one occasion, when he was in love with the wife of a lieutenant of the carbineers who was ordered to Burgos, he nearly died of grief. His mad passion inspired him with the idea of going off to get a glimpse of her, so after writing a letter of farewell to his father and taking twenty dollars of his savings he started for the City of the Cid ; but in Venta de Baños he unfortunately came across a married lady of the Civil Guard who attracted him to Palencia ; there he saw another

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lady who took him farther, and so on, until he came back to Sarrio. This was not his only escapade. On another occasion he went fifteen miles on foot merely to cast an amatory glance at a certain lady as she sat at the window, and this lady was married to a second husband.

As the final touch to this description we must add that Periquito, to use his father's expression, ate like Heliogabulus, and yet he never grew fat.

“The Light of Sarrio” was for our impressionable young man an admirable means of airing the vague fancies, anxieties, joys, and distresses which consumed his soul, and declaring himself in mysterious acrostics to all the matrons, more or less stout, who paraded their plump forms in the streets of the flourishing town.

Finally came the columns of “Intelligence” under different headings. The genius of Sinforoso and the rest of the staff of “The Light” shone in this portion of the paper. The paragraph called “Going and Coming” referred to the visitors who had come to Sarrio in view of the approaching *fêtes*.

Another, headed “Sarriensians out Walking,” maintained in a graceful, sparkling style that the weather was delicious, and that the people of Sarrio could not do better in the evening than take a turn in the pretty, leafy environs of the town.

Another, “Señor Alcalde to the Fore,” was an appeal to Don Roque to have gutters put to several houses.

Later on this section dropped the title of “Intelligence” for that of “News to Hand,” which Don Rosendo put in imitation of *Nouvelle à la main* of the “Figaro”

The journal ended with the charade in verse, of which, if we recollect rightly, the word was “avellano.”

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The fiction was Don Rufo's department, and as he had been studying French on the Ollendorf system for a year and a half, he decided to translate for the paper the six volumes of the "Mysteries of Paris." It is unnecessary to say that although "The Light of Sarrio" lived for some years, it never got as far as the third volume. Don Rufo was a wonderful translator. If he had a defect it was that of translating too literally. Once he wrote: "The carriage went off at a quick trot, inside a lady fair and frail."

In another passage, he said that Mon. Rudolph passed his youth in the perusal of the chief works of antiquity. Finally, he represented the Countess as taking hold of the button (instead of buttonholing) of the secretary, and this provoked so much derision from ignorant folk that Don Rufo lost his temper and resigned the work, which then was undertaken by a pilot who for several years had made the run to Bayonne. The success of the first number, as was expected, was prodigious: the article by Sinforoso, the learned dissertation by La Fuente, the "Intelligence," and even Periquito's verses, were all read with due appreciation by the public. But Don Rosendo's article headed "Our Purports" made the profoundest impression on people of a serious turn of mind. The well-turned phrases, so full of spirit and fire, the noble thoughts, the enthusiasm for the interests of Sarrio, the frankness and modesty that characterized it, filled their hearts with joy, and made them feel as if an era of prosperity and well-being had dawned. That night the band, conducted by Señor Anselmo, with his great shining key, serenaded the staff. The front of the publishing office was illuminated with Venetian lamps, and, as usual, the pretty light-hearted artisans of Sarrio took the opportunity of dancing country dances

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and mazurkas on the hard stones of the street. The worthy individuals who gave voice to their admiration and enthusiasm for the staff of “The Light” in the language of music were inspired thereto by De Rueda’s wine and cigars. Joy reigned in every heart, and overflowed in embraces as hearty as they were spontaneous. Don Rosendo embraced Navarro, Alvaro Peña, Don Rudesindo, Don Rufo, Sinforoso, and Don Pedro Miranda, the printer Folgueras. The musicians embraced each other, and they all embraced their conductor, Señor Anselmo. Outside the printing office, Pablito, also in commemoration of the auspicious day, embraced the fair Nieves under the shadow of a doorway, and several other lads following his example openly distributed their commemorative kisses among the happy girls. The only thing that disturbed the general happiness was the peculiar sadness that came over Folgueras after he had imbibed several litres of wine. The recollection of Lancia, his natal town, suddenly occurred to him and threw him into a state of depression difficult to describe. Just when cheerfulness and gaiety had reached their height he called Don Rosendo aside, and with tears in his eyes assured him that life away from his adored town was an unsupportable burden to him; better to die than lose sight of the humble dwelling which saw his birth and the streets trodden by his baby feet. The same week, please God, he hoped to leave Sarrio and return to Lancia with his belongings.

On hearing this sudden news Don Rosendo turned pale.

“But, man, the next number of ‘The Light.’”

“Don Rosendo, you will have to excuse me. You are a gentleman—a gentleman knows how to appreciate the feelings of another gentleman. One’s country before everything. Guzman the Good flung his poniard to the

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enemy to kill his own son. You know that well enough, eh? What do you think of that? Riego died on a scaffold. Well! What do you think of that? If I were in the workhouse, with not a shirt to stand up in, there would be no need for any one to tell me anything. Do you think you will keep me all tied like a dog to the wheel? But all sentiment dies out in a man—the man lives, the man works, the man occasionally shows his true self—and because he drinks a quartern, or two, or three, is he to forget his country? Eh? What do you think of that?"

Don Rosendo called Don Rudesindo to his assistance, and they succeeded in dissuading the printer from his course by the force of their strong reasons, the most potent of these being a fresh bottle of Rueda wine. After this was imbibed, the patriotic feelings of Folgueras calmed down. Then he took another bottle, drank it, was ill, and slept.

Thoughts of glory, vague desires for undying fame filled the mind of the illustrious founder of "The Light of Sarrio" by the time he retired to rest. After extinguishing the light, they recurred over and over again until they took some definite form. Don Rosendo was moved at the thought of the possibility of his memory being perpetuated by a tablet put up in the Consistorial buildings. This ambitious thought made him tremble with joy and delight between the sheets. Being a modest, sensible, magnanimous man, he tried to expel the idea, but it returned to his mind with additional clearness. He saw the white marble, he saw the gold letters, he clearly deciphered the graven lines :

"Tribute of gratitude from the town of Sarrio to her enlightened son, Don Rosendo Belinchon, indefatigable champion of her moral and material progress."

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His mind, filled with these brilliant forecasts, could not easily succumb to Morpheus; nevertheless, he finally slept with a smile on his lips. A progressive angel, ready for these emergencies, beat his wings over his brow through the night watches and gave him pleasant dreams.

The next morning found him in the cheerful frame of mind befitting a man who has seen his efforts crowned with enviable success. He performed his toilet to the humming of scraps of song, he took chocolate with his family, gave a glance at the national and foreign newspapers, and without cutting his usual bundle of toothpicks, he went out to ascertain what effect the first number of “The Light” had produced upon the town. He was received at Graell’s shop with effusion, he was congratulated on his article, which he modestly tried to disclaim, and the talk about the paper was long and eager.

What most excited the enthusiasm of the habitués of the café was, to think that Nieva had not yet arrived, nor would it arrive for some time, at a similar state of advancement. And Don Rosendo, not a little elated with these eulogies, promised to take active measures in favor of all that was asked of him. One requested that the deep ruts of the Calle de Atras should be mentioned; another that a lamp should be put outside his house; another that some pills should be recommended; another, that serenades should not disturb the hours of sleep, etc., etc. Don Rosendo assented to all, knitted his brows and extended his open hand in a valedictory fashion. The journal would settle it all. Woe to him who ran counter to the reforms of the press! He had often held forth on toothpicks to the assembly of respected matrons of the town generally gathered in Doña Rafaelo’s shop, but “The Light” was the subject of his discourse

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to-day. The fiction portion seemed to have met with the most favor from the fair sex ; Don Rosendo told them the next number would be much more interesting, and then he withdrew.

A party of sailors by the port were loud in their congratulations, and they hinted that the harbor was very dirty and required dragging.

"It shall be done—it shall be done," said Don Rosendo, and he went off full of a solemn sense of his omnipotence, and seeing the large curling waves in the distance, he even asked himself if it would not be a good thing to ask them, by means of the press, to moderate their uncalled-for excitement. At the approach of the dinner hour he directed his steps homewards, meditating on the grave responsibility he would incur before God and man if he did not use his great power for the prosperity and improvement of his native town. On arriving at the Rua Nueva, he met Gabino Maza. The choleric ex-officer greeted him very politely, asked after his family, and made the kindest inquiries after the health of each member ; then he talked for some time on the possibility of the cold northeast wind soon changing into a warm, southwesterly one, asked when the next ships would start for America ; he then complained of the dust on the roads, which made walking unpleasant, spoke of the price of codfish, and the news of the Newfoundland cod fisheries, but Rosendo naturally expected him to mention the paper. Nothing of the sort. Maza did not make the slightest allusion to it. This began to upset our friend and made his position painful. The conversation passed from one subject to another without bearing at all upon the press. At last Don Rosendo, showing his gleaming teeth, said somewhat abruptly :

“ The Light of Sarrio ”

“ Have you not received “ The Light ” ? One of the first copies was sent to you.”

“ Dear me ! I think it did come to the house yesterday, but I have not opened it yet,” returned Maza with affected indifference. “ I say, Don Rosendo, will you come and dine with me ? *Au revoir*, then.”

Don Rosendo stood for an instant rooted to the ground, feeling as if a bucket of cold water had been thrown over him. The blood rushed violently to his face, and he almost staggered home. The unexpectedness of the blow made him feel it much more keenly. When the shock had passed off, he fell into a violent passion against that—he could not resist calling him anything less than a malicious and despicable creature. He arrived home in a deplorable state of agitation, and although he took his seat at the table and made violent efforts to calm himself, his digestion was so thoroughly upset that he recoiled from all food. He was gloomy and silent during the meal ; a sarcastic smile occasionally wreathed his lips, and he murmured : “ The villain ! ”

Finally his wife, who was upset on her own account, ventured to say :

“ What is the matter, Rosendo ? ”

“ Nothing, Paulina ; but envy causes a lot of wickedness in the world,” was the short, bitter reply.

Having given utterance to this profound remark, he remained in a state of comparative repose, leaning back in an armchair to collect his thoughts ; and after the expiration of half an hour he once more sallied forth in the direction of the Club. On entering the café Gabino’s voice fell upon his ears, shouting as usual up-stairs. From the staircase he thought he heard him talking of the periodical and calling it “ a solemn farce.” His heart jumped, and he entered the room agitated and



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upset. At the sight of him Maza, who was gesticulating in the centre of a group of men, put on his hat with a sudden gesture, and took a seat upon the sofa.

Don Lorenzo and Don Feliciano Gomez greeted the new-comer with a certain embarrassment, and with some shamefacedness, all of which confirmed Don Rosendo in his suspicion. He hid his feelings as much as possible, and striving to assume a cheerful demeanor he began talking of the current news. Conversation then took its natural course, and confidence was restored. But the engineer Delaunay, as artful as he was malignant, turned the conversation upon the newspaper, and in the lisping tone that he affected, he said, with an ironical smile, to the founder :

“What little contributions are you preparing for the next number, Don Rosendo?”

“You will see when it comes out,” returned the chief editor, who knew there was a joke underlying the question.

“Here, in Don Feliciano,” continued the engineer with the same smile, “you have a staunch defender.”

“If he defends me it is because somebody has attacked me,” returned Rosendo with increased asperity.

Nobody said a word. Silence reigned for some time, until it was broken by Belinchon making a casual remark to Don Jaime, and the conversation was resumed. But the blow had only been momentarily averted; thunder was in the air and soon became audible.

Maza was consumed with the desire to tell Don Rosendo that the paper was a humbug, and the latter was not less anxious to tell Maza that he was a malignant fellow. Thus both took advantage of the first opportunity of communicating these polite remarks. The dispute lasted more than two hours. Maza tried to restrain

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himself because of Don Rosendo's superior position, and besides, he owed him fifteen thousand reales. The founder of "The Light" also considered it prudent not to give full expression to his thoughts. Nevertheless, for better or for worse, all came out for the edification of the notabilities who ranged themselves on one side or the other of the contending parties. It must be confessed that the minority was on Maza's side. The West Indians, neutral, as usual in these disputes, occasionally appeared, cue in hand, at the door of the billiard room to listen to the arguments of the disputants and gain some light on the subject. For those discussions were very improving, as they taught them many terms and phrases unknown to them; and thus they were less shut out from even a superficial interest in the many problems of life. It was unfortunate that their devotion to billiards prevented their always listening.

The state of agitation and anger in which Don Rosendo left the club cannot be exaggerated. His noble, magnanimous soul was wounded to the quick by the ingratitude and baseness of his false friends. It must be horrible to live and die in obscurity and to have Heaven-born gifts wasted in boredom and inaction when one is meant to shine in the higher spheres of human society. But it is still more painful to see the depreciation of one's noble mental efforts and magnanimous endeavors for the triumph of goodness and truth. Such was the case with Socrates, Solon, Giordano Bruno, and also with our hero. The first sting of malignity caused him the acute pain which great benefactors of the human race cannot but feel, and his spirit failed him. It was only for a minute, however, a mere passing weakness which bore witness to his sensitive disposition.

Nevertheless, that night he could eat no supper, and



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it was a long time before he could manage to sleep. To how many depressing thoughts had this incident given rise. Whilst the common herd of the townfolk of Sarrío, destitute of genius, perspicacity, and intellect, slept soundly, the philanthropic man lay tossing on his couch as if it were a bed of thorns, robbed of the enjoyment of refreshing sleep.

He rose the next morning somewhat pale and hollow-eyed, but firm in his determination to continue his work of regeneration. The sleepless night, instead of weakening his intention and making him relax in his efforts, had only strengthened him in his course, and roused him to fresh efforts. Fire consumes and turns straw to ashes, but it purifies gold.

Therefore he proceeded enthusiastically in the organization of his plan for the second number, which was to appear the following Thursday, and as usual success brought many offers of assistance. Many were the contributions sent for the second number, but the majority was below the mark, and want of space obliged him to reject several that were good. This gave rise to a great deal of grumbling and bad feeling—second difficulty in the course of his patriotic enterprise. But on the publication of the fifth number there was a much more serious trouble, which caused a great sensation in the town and gave rise to a perfect storm. It happened that Alvaro Peña, being quite convinced, as we know, that all the miseries and drawbacks suffered by the human race are exclusively due to the clerical influence, thought he would use the press as a field of an active campaign against it. This he opened by sending as skirmishers several paragraphs, asking about the funds of a certain sisterhood of the Rosary which were not forthcoming, speaking in disrespectful terms of the Daughters of

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Mary, and making irreverent remarks of the nones, and confessions, and also ridiculing the scapularies worn by the young religieuses in the town. But the shots were particularly aimed at Don Benigno the curate, the director of the female consciences of Sarrio and the instigator of all those revolts against sin. The rector was an old apathetic man who passed his life in a little house near the town, and willingly left to his curate the care of the souls of his flock. And Don Benigno fulfilled his duty as an active, vigilant, and most zealous pastor, keeping watch over the flock by day and night, so that no wolf should take off any sheep, and giving most careful personal attention to those he purposed offering to the Heavenly Bridegroom. Nothing could exceed the ardor with which he procured brides for the Most High. As soon as a young girl knelt at his feet for confession he thought that he was in a position to insinuate that the world was corrupt, its pleasures were transitory and often damnatory, earthly love was corrupt, affection as a daughter and sister was despicable, the time of working out salvation was very short, therefore the best thing to be done was to leave this earthly world (Don Benigno was very fond of this adjective), surrender all to Christ, and repair to that delightful retreat spoken of by San Juan de la Cruz, and there remain oblivious of all cares. He knew just such a happy retreat, a real little piece of Heaven, where one could enjoy in anticipation the delights reserved by God for his faithful servants. This retreat was a Carmelite convent, just founded in the outskirts of the town, and the curate was its great patron and supporter. Certainly this had caused a slight coolness between him and Don Segis, the chaplain of the Augustinians, but the latter did not dare to show his resentment because it would not have served his purpose



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to quarrel with his coadjutor. These insinuations to the young girls were sometimes effectual, sometimes not. Don Benigno rarely made them in the ears of an elderly person. We do not know if he thought that Heaven would rather receive a bride of fifteen than one of thirty, or whether he thought the older people were more obstinate and suspicious than the young girls. Anyhow, that spiritual sport induced interesting episodes. On one occasion the priest was the victim of an assault made by a youth who had been robbed of his bride-elect by the convent. On another occasion, after having obtained a dowry for a young girl, and having provided her with clothes, the bride of Heaven escaped in the night with a tailor's assistant. Don Benigno used to take the brides himself to the abode of the Bridegroom. When there were difficulties to overcome on the part of the family, he bore himself with the skill and energy of a consummate lady-killer, and he organized and carried out the conquest with an astuteness that many mundane suitors would have envied. It was this matter to which Alvaro Peña referred when in a certain paragraph he mentioned a certain priest devoted to "pigeon-sport." And as we know Don Benigno's proclivity in this direction, the shaft went home with diabolical effect. The readers also understood the allusion, and laughed not a little at the mischievous joke.

Seeing himself made fun of like this, the priest, being, like all artists, of susceptible and choleric temperament, grew terribly angry.

"Have you read Don Rosendo's paper?" he asked Don Segis that evening at Morana's.

It must be mentioned that since the first irreverent paragraph Don Benigno never spoke of "The Light of Sarrio" by any other term.

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“Yes, I read it this morning, at Graell’s.”

“And what do you think of that insult?”

“What insult?” asked the chaplain calmly.

“Why, man, have you not read the infamous remarks made about me?”

Don Segis raised his glass to his eyes, attentively examined the golden liquid, put it to his lips, and slowly drank it. After coughing a little, and drying his mouth with a silk handkerchief, he said gravely :

“Tush! There is not a kind spirit about it, as we all say; but it is best to take such things calmly, it is no good exciting one’s self.”

This is a fresh blow to the curate, who had hoped to find his indignation shared by Don Segis, and he was dumb with suppressed rage. It was thus that the chaplain of the Augustine convent was able to pay Don Benigno out for his uncalled-for partiality to the rising convent. The curate then addressed himself to Señor Anselmo and to Don Juan, “the old salt,” who both expressed disgust at the paragraph, without, however, showing much interest in the subject, for we know that that would not have been in keeping with the quiet character of the patriarchal gathering.

But on the following Thursday, Alvaro Peña left Don Benigno, and attacked the chaplain of the nuns, making him the subject of a description in verse, and giving a graceful reference to the mingling of the glasses of gin with the quarterns of white wine. It was then Don Segis’s turn to be furious, and Don Benigno’s to be calm. But it was evident that this calmness was only put on, merely assumed to pay Don Segis off for his want of sympathy, for, as a matter of fact, he was still bleeding from his wound. Therefore it was not long before a reconciliation took place, and they both agreed, with



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unusual ardor, to skin every one who wrote in Don Rosendo's paper, beginning with the founder himself, and ending with the owner of the printing press. They were quite aware that Alvaro Peña was the author of the insults, but as every one had always known that he was a soulless vampire, capable of sucking the blood of all the clerics of Sarrio, to avoid harping on the same string they soon turned from him and laid all the blame on Sinforoso.

They considered themselves justified in this course, because the young fellow had been a seminarist, and consequently a traitor. Then he came from the same stock, for his father was a Carlist, and his grandfather before him. Moreover, Don Rosendo Belinchon, Don Rudesindo, and Alvaro Peña and Don Rufo, all men of certain position in the town, might have some license and do as they liked—"but that puppy! that ragamuffin!"

Excited by the murmur of applause, Don Benigno drank a few more quarters than usual, and the chaplain would not let himself be outdone.

When the habitués left the shop in the classic chain, Don Segis noticed that his swelled leg dragged less than usual, and he remarked it to Don Benigno, who congratulated him on the fact. Then when, a few steps later, they reached the walls of Augustine convent, Don Segis said in a loud voice, that as he felt no desire to go to bed that night he would go on with him. But the curate whispered in his ear that he would like to speak to him in private, so both remained in front of the convent.

"Friend Don Segis, what do you think of going and pulling Perinolo's son's nose for him?"

"Gently! gently! gently!"

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“If we could only give him a hiding, without any scandal, of course.”

“Gently ! gently !”

“At eleven, or half past, they leave the café. We can wait for him about there, and then administer a little corporal punishment.”

“Gently ! gently ! gently !”

“Are you a man, or are you not, Don Segis ?”

This question, innocent as it was, produced great perturbation in the mind of the chaplain, to judge by the series of faces and agitated gestures which he made before he could find his voice.

“Who ? I ? I would never have believed that a friend and coadjutor could say such a thing to me !”

Then he turned aside in great emotion, and raised his handkerchief to his eyes, which shed some tears.

“Well, men should comfort themselves as men. Come along, and let us chastise this rascal.”

“Come along !” replied the chaplain in a firm tone, as he turned in the direction of his house.

“Not that way, Don Segis.”

“Which way you like.”

The two clerics took each other by the arm, and proceeded on their way, not without certain vacillations, in the direction of the Café Marina. It must be observed that they both adopted a lay costume in the evening ; they wore black frock coats, with full skirts and tight sleeves, thick boots, and enormous felt hats.

It was a good quarter of an hour before they finally reached the café. Once there, dazzled by the lights, like silly butterflies, they almost collapsed and withdrew.

“It will be better to wait for him near his own house. There are several people about here still,” said Don Benigno.



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Don Segis, being in a submissive state of mind, followed his friend's suggestion.

In the Calle de Caborana, at the corner of that of Azucar, which leads to the Rua Nueva, they both took up their positions, a stroke of strategy, as the enemy had to pass that way, for his house was situated in the Calle de Caborana. Then the two clerics displayed the persistence of the Navarrese in the defile of Roncesvalles, for during the half hour's waiting, they bore with indomitable heroism exposure to a fine rain, without fear of rheumatism or without any other mundane consideration causing them to budge an inch from their post of occupation. Finally, relieved in his mind and satisfied with having maintained a heated discussion in the café, the chief editor of "The Light" directed his steps to his house, when he unexpectedly came upon the enraged curate, who said in a shrill voice :

"Listen here, boy ; if you will now repeat the insults which you have written in Don Rosendo's paper, I shall be very glad to hear them."

Surprise, the sarcastic and threatening tone of the priest, and the sight of the portly form of Don Segis standing motionless as a reserve force a few steps off, filled Sinforoso with such terror that for some time he was speechless ; and it was only when the cleric advanced a step towards him that he managed to say :

"Calm yourself, Don Benigno. I did not use your name."

"Hallo !" exclaimed the priest with a fierce smile, "I see you don't crow so loud now. What is the matter with the cock that does not crow ? What is wrong with the cock that does not crow, boy ?"

Don Benigno took a step forward, and Sinforoso took a step backward.

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Don Segis, the reserve force, also advanced a step to preserve the strategical distance.

"Calm yourself, Don Benigno!" cried Sinforoso in terror.

"I am very calm, young fellow! I only want to hear that about the doves again which pleased me so much."

"I did not write it!" exclaimed Perinolo's son in dismay.

"You did not write it, boy? Then take this for when you do write it." And he levelled a blow at the editor's cheek.

"Calm yourself, Don Benigno!" exclaimed the wretched fellow as he fell backwards with his hands outstretched.

"Don't I tell you I am very calm? You braggart. Here's another little dove!" And he administered another blow.

"For God's sake, Don Benigno, calm yourself!"

"There goes another little dove!" another blow followed.

Let us say now, before going any farther, that of all the blows given in Sarrio during the two years subsequent to the appearance of "The Light" (and goodness knows they were innumerable), the cheeks of this distinguished youth were the butt of at least one-half of them.

Being powerless to calm his infuriated assailant by his entreaties, and suspecting the doves would prove to be numerous, the chief editor cried out with all his strength:

"Help! help! They are killing me!" Then he turned round to take refuge in flight, but the iron fingers of the priest caught him by the arm, and at the

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same moment Don Segis, thinking that the time had come for him to join in the fray, levelled a heavy blow on his shoulders with his stout stick.

"Help!" cried the wretched fellow again. It happened that at that moment Alvaro Peña, the intrepid naval officer, who was proceeding from Graell's shop, where he generally spent his evenings, to his dwelling in the Calle del Azucar, rushed to the spot, saying:

"What is the matter, Sinforoso? What is the matter?"

"Help, Don Alvaro; they are killing me!"

"Hold on, Sinforoso, help is coming!" he cried as he rapidly approached.

The priests, hearing the voice of that hated and terrible enemy of the Church, were much alarmed, but emboldened by the fight, they faced him in battle line with their sticks raised in the air. Peña was filled with mingled rage and pleasure as he advanced to the attack.

"Windbags!" he cried, as he wielded his stick, and Don Benigno's enormous hat flew twenty paces off.

Don Segis advanced with the purpose of aiming his stick at the head of the officer, but before he could do so a blow caught him at the back of the head, leaving him badly hurt.

"It might have been expected. Caramba! only nocturnal birds are capable of treacherously laying in wait for a defenceless man, making a street brawl and disturbing the neighbors' rest. We must have done with these bloodsuckers who sap the life of the town and try to keep it in a state of barbarism. Call these the ministers of God! The apostles of charity! The eternal disturbers of the social circle!"

Even in this critical moment the officer could not drop the anti-clerical rhetoric and pompous style that

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he always adopted. Every phrase was accompanied with a blow. The priests being powerless to withstand his furious attack, tried to take to their heels. The curate soon got out of reach of the stick, but poor Don Segis, with the extraordinary weight of his left leg, was left behind, and had to endure the blows from Peña's weapon for some time. Alvaro's voice could be heard in the distance, crying out in mocking rebuke :

“Hypocrites ! Whited sepulchres ! Is this conformity with the spirit of the Gospel, you brawlers ? You preach peace and love to mankind, and you are the first to disgrace the sacred doctrine ! When shall we shake off your yoke and emancipate ourselves from the slavery in which you have kept us for so long ! ”

Any one would have thought to hear him that he was making a speech in some democratic club instead of administering corporal punishment.

Thus ended that encounter.

The next morning the harbor-master received a visit from the rector of Sarrio, who came to implore him not to make mention of the unfortunate incident in the newspaper, and offering all kinds of apologies to both him and Sinforoso on behalf of the curate and Don Segis.

Peña declined to accede to this request, for it was an admirable opportunity to open an attack upon the enemies of liberty and progress ; and, in fact, the next number of “The Light” contained a circumstantial account, written in a humorous style, of all that had taken place, which greatly exercised the minds of the clergy and the timorous people in the town.

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CHAPTER XI

GONZALO MARRIES.—SERIOUS DISTURBANCES AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE CLUB

THE weighty and serious matters on Don Rosendo's mind prevented his giving the painful incident that had disturbed the even tenor of his house the especial attention that he would have accorded it at any other time. Nevertheless he was much upset when he learned of Gonzalo's treachery and his younger daughter's misconduct, and he held long conversations with his wife on the subject—irrefutable proof that great men may be full of exalted, grand ideas, and yet not blind to the things of this world, as is usually supposed. His first impulse was to send off Gonzalo and shut his daughter up in a convent, but the entreaties of Doña Paula and his own clear-minded conclusions led him to change his purpose.

At the expiration of some days of indecision (the burden of the other cares caused their number to be few) he granted the ill-conducted young people permission to marry; but not without first having an interview with Cecilia, and hearing from her lips that she willingly forgave her sister, and wished the marriage to take place as soon as possible.

The consent being given, Gonzalo presented himself one afternoon at Belinchon's house. It was a fortnight since he had been there, and his heart sank at the prospect in spite of his wishes having been so fully and promptly realized. He dreaded the first interview, and

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not without reason. Doña Paula received him with marked coldness, and even the servants' manners were tinged with a hostility which hurt him.

Then the idea of seeing Cecilia made him tremble. But when Venturita came into the room all his fear and depression vanished. Her sprightly chatter, the bright sparkle of her eyes and her graceful mocking coquetry quickly raised his spirits, and transported him into the seventh heaven. The enchanting enthralment of her voice and manners had lulled him into an indifference to all else by the time Cecilia entered the room.

The sight of his victim exercised a strange and sudden effect upon him ; he automatically rose from his seat, and his face changed color.

"How do you do, Gonzalo?"

This was said by Cecilia, as if she had seen him the preceding day and nothing particular had happened, only she was a shade paler than usual. But the young man was so overwhelmed with confusion that he could not reply to this simple question without stuttering. The clear and tranquil glance of Cecilia affected him like an electric current, and he turned to Doña Paula, whose face was overshadowed with a severe and melancholy expression, whilst Venturita looked out of the window with assumed indifference. At last he resumed his seat, trembling violently, and Cecilia, who had come to ask her mother for the keys of the cupboards, gave him a quiet smile of farewell as she left the room.

The preparations for the marriage commenced. Doña Paula had the delicacy, rare in a low-born woman, not to allow a single article of wearing apparel made for Cecilia to serve for her sister.

So a fresh trousseau was quickly put in hand. To the great surprise of the needlewomen, Cecilia joined in the

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work. Some attributed this concession to kindness, others to want of feeling. It is true that, although a little thin, her face expressed the same quiet cheerfulness as ever, and her fingers worked at her sister's initials with the same dexterity as when she embroidered her own. But the cutting of the scissors, *chis, chis*, and the sewing of the needles, *cruj, cruj*, seemed to say horrible things, ah ! very horrible things, instead of those pretty ones which used to make her tremble with joy.

They remained buried in her heart, however, and the keenest observer would have read nothing in those large, liquid, beautiful eyes but the usual quiet smile.

"Didn't I tell you so, girl?" whispered Teresa in Valentina's ear as she looked at our young friend.

"Yes, Señorita Cecilia is incapable of loving anybody."

Gonzalo avoided the workroom, and when perchance he appeared he was so abashed and confused that the embroideresses winked at each other and smiled. Seeing him so embarrassed, and Cecilia so calm and indifferent, you would have thought that the parts played by both in the sad love affair had been reversed.

In the meantime tongues wagged on the subject in the shops, in the houses, in the streets, and at the Promenade—there was no end to it. The event caused a great sensation in the town. Whilst preparations for Cecilia's marriage had been going on, it had been the general opinion that Gonzalo showed a deplorable want of taste, that he was throwing himself away on the poor girl, who was represented as little less than a monster of ugliness ; and they all wondered why he had not chosen her sister, who was so lovely and so graceful. Directly they learned of the change their opinions suddenly veered round.

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"What a scandal! What a disgraceful proceeding! What parents to consent to such infamy! Where was the shame of some people? Poor girl, so beautiful, so slender, with such lovely eyes! Well, I consider her prettier than her sister."

"So do I."

We must not miss the opportunity of saying that this eternal discontent of people with regard to the actions of their fellow-creatures, much as it upsets us, does not argue intentional unkindness, malignity, or envy, as we are apt to think when we are the object of their remarks; it is nothing but an evident tribute to the imperfection of our planetary existence and the love of the ideal that every one bears within himself without ever seeing it realized. After having thus shown ourselves both philosophical and optimistic, we will proceed with our story.

The day of the marriage arrived. It was solemnized early in the morning at Belinchon's house, in the presence of a few relations and friends; and after taking chocolate, the bride and bridegroom left for Tejada.

This was an estate about four miles from the town, where Don Rosendo's genius, aided by money, had had full scope to produce great effects. When he bought the place it consisted of several fields and a wood, where cows pastured, and the notes of thrushes, linnets, and blackbirds filled the air. Don Rosendo began by doing away with this indigenous colony, and substituting a foreign one for it. The breed of cattle of the country was proscribed and replaced by one from Switzerland. The same ruthlessness was shown in robbing the trees of their native songsters, and hanging them with cages full of rare, exotic birds that croaked dolefully all the year round at sunset. The energetic reformatory spirit of



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Don Rosendo did not stop at the animal kingdom, for it was brought with equal relentlessness to bear upon the vegetable one, and the character of the place was thus completely transformed. By degrees the great shady chestnut trees, with their gnarled trunks; the gigantic oaks, which had renewed their scalloped foliage more than three hundred times; the walnut trees, that looked like enormous thistles; the luxuriant orchard trees, bowed to the ground with the weight of the luscious fruit, and many other trees pertaining to a good landed property in the country, all gradually succumbed to the saw and the axe.

Washingtonians, araucarias, excelsas, and many other trees of foreign extraction, chiefly of the coniferæ family, were planted in their room, which made the place look something like a cemetery in the eyes of the vulgar.

However, when any such remark was made to Don Rosendo he merely replied that coniferæ had the advantage of foliage during the winter, and the vulgar would return that that very fact made it look like a cemetery in the winter, and in the summer too. But Don Rosendo did not deign to reply to such a silly remark, and in this he was right.

As everything that is worth much costs much, the foreigners of both kingdoms absorbed a good deal of Belinchon's income. The birds of the country had fed themselves and dressed their feathers without any extraneous assistance, but those from abroad, shut up in cages and enormous aviaries made for the purpose, required several attendants to feed them and to keep their places clean. Then home-sickness caused great blanks among them which could only be filled by sending expensive orders to Paris and London. The same thing happened with the vegetable kingdom, only of every

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plant that succeeded by dint of great care and cultivation thirty or forty died, and the constant attention of the gardeners could not prevent this mortality.

The house was also neither Spanish nor European in style. It was built in Chinese style, with little pagodas rising upon every side. I do not know what connection these little towers had with Babel, the scene of the confusion of tongues, but I must tell you that in the neighborhood the fantastic building went by the name of "Don Rosendo's Babel."

It was magnificently furnished, and wanting in none of the comforts and refinements afforded by modern civilization to the rich. It had a splendid room, decorated in Persian style, a bath-room, a large dining-room, fairly well frescoed, and several beautiful little airy apartments, where the light penetrated through colored windows.

So Gonzalo and Ventura repaired to this nest two hours after their union had been solemnized. On their way thither they had talked without embarrassment on different subjects. The young man had imprinted several kisses on the cheeks of the girl, as when they were betrothed; but on arriving at the "Babel," and finding themselves alone in the Persian chamber, he was overwhelmed with confusion and awkwardness.

He tried to find subjects of conversation, but he failed in the attempt.

Venturita scarcely answered him, but she looked at him with an expression of mingled passion and coquetry.

"Look here, stop—stop talking that nonsense. Leave off and give me a kiss," she added laughing, and patting his mouth with her primrose hand. Then Gonzalo colored deeply, and kissed her passionately.

His passion of these first days bordered on madness.



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Venturita, with her singular beauty, the languid, voluptuous expression of her eyes, and her invincible tendency to recline, was a perfect odalisque. But unlike one in being merely a beautiful animal, she was full of a mischievous spirit that bubbled forth at every moment in rather equivocal jokes and meaning puns, so that Gonzalo was always roaring with merriment, in ignorance of the danger of that mood between husband and wife. The life they led was very sedentary, for Ventura did not like going out; the sun gave her headache and the cold hurt her throat. She spent much time in the adornment of her person, and changed her dresses as often as if she were in Madrid, so that the greater part of the day was spent in her dressing-room. This did not displease Gonzalo; for, on the contrary, when he saw her appear looking lovely and graceful, exhaling a penetrating perfume like a tropical flower, he was transported with delight, and a tremor of passion shook his whole being as he thought that that exquisite work of nature was his—entirely his.

Nevertheless, everything was not quite like what he had imagined it would be. Sometimes the young bride, half in earnest, half in joke, shut herself up in her room and there spent three or four hours without permitting him to enter, in spite of his affectionate entreaties through the keyhole.

"I rob you of the sight of me for some time," she would say afterwards, laughing, "to increase your wish to be with me."

And, in fact, these coquetries augmented the young man's passion to such an extent that it became quite a madness. When the beauty felt inclined, they walked in the grounds, but they did not go far. On arriving at one of the few shady, cool retreats which had escaped

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the reforming hand of Don Rosendo, the girl liked to sit down—but neither upon the grass nor the rustic seats, so Gonzalo had to run and fetch an armchair for her from the house.

“Now sit here at my feet.”

The young man then prostrated himself at her side and passionately kissed the hands that his beautiful wife gave him.

“Samson and Delilah!” she laughingly exclaimed, putting her snowdrop hands through the ruddy curly beard of her husband.

“You are right,” he replied with a sigh. “A Samson without hair.”

“You no hair!—and this—what is this?” she returned, ruffling his locks and making them stand up like a broom.

“I am speaking of my strength.”

“You have not strength, eh? Let’s see—show me your arms.”

Laughing, he took off his jacket, and turning up the sleeves of his shirt he brought to view his enormous gladiatorial arms, on which the powerful muscles stood up like a network of cords.

“What strength!” exclaimed the girl, taking hold of one arm with both hands, which were unable to compass it. Then, seized with sudden enthusiasm and admiration, she added :

“How strong, how handsome you are, Gonzalo! Let me bite your arm?”

And bending down she tried to insert her pretty little teeth into the flesh, but the youth had such iron muscles that her teeth only passed over the skin without breaking it.

Then she grew vexed, and tried again to succeed in

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piercing the flesh at all costs. Finally he relaxed his muscles, and said :

"I will let you bite me, but only on condition that you draw blood."

"No, not so," she replied, whilst her pleased smile expressed the wish to do it.

"Yes, you must draw blood ; if not I won't let you do it."

Then the girl proceeded to bite her husband's arm.

"Harder !" he cried.

And she bit harder.

"Harder !" he repeated.

And she bit harder still, whilst a mischievous smile sparkled in her eyes.

"Harder ! harder !"

"Enough," she said, rising from her seat ; "don't you see I have drawn blood ? How cruel, just as if I were a dog !"

And bending down again, she sucked with delight the blood that welled up in the arm. Both smiled with repressed passion, and then they looked at the little red circle made by the girl's teeth.

"Do you see ?" she repeated, half ashamed. "Well, it was one of your strange fancies !"

"Thanks ! I should like this mark to remain here forever. But no, unfortunately it will soon go."

"I can renew it every day," she mischievously returned.

"I should be very pleased."

"You want to make your wife into a little dog ; well, you had better say so plainly."

And suddenly embracing him, and kissing him passionately on the eyes, cheeks, mouth, and beard, she repeated incessantly :

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"Say so plainly! say so plainly, you bear! This mouth is mine, and I kiss it. This beard is mine, and I kiss it, too. This neck is mine, and I kiss it. These arms are mine, mine, and I kiss them too!"

"Take me altogether; my life is yours," he said, intoxicated with happiness.

"I love you; I love you, Gonzalo, for your good looks and your strength. Look, let me put my hand on yours—what a difference! It looks like an ant."

"A white ant," he returned, taking the little hand between his own great strong ones.

"I love you; I love you, Gonzalo. Take me in your arms. Could you walk with me like that?"

"Oh! you are nothing."

And lifting her like a feather, and putting her on his arm like a child, he began jumping about the garden.

"Not so fast! Carry me gently. Let us go for a walk."

So he carried her all over the park without feeling any fatigue. And from that day that kind of walk pleased the girl so much that whenever they went out she clung to her husband's neck for him to carry her.

The servants smiled and shook their heads at the sight. But a still better way of amusing her was very soon discovered. There was a swing near the house, out of order, but more from time than use. It was repaired, and as soon as it was ready it afforded many hours of occupation to Gonzalo.

"If you could only know how I enjoy it! Push a little more."

Whereupon the youth's vigorous push made the swing fly, and the girl's eyes closed and her nostrils dilated with a feeling of intense delight, and Gonzalo liked seeing her so well amused.

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Thus twenty days went by. During that time they received two visits from Pablito and Piscis; once they came in the tilbury, and once on horseback. The chief object on this last occasion was to ride a mare that Pablo had received in exchange for an older one. And strange to say, in spite of being so much in love, our young friend received the visits of the two equestrians with inexpressible delight, entered deeply into their interests, and when they had gone he had a feeling of void in his life, for his blood and his muscles were suffering from the extremely sedentary life he was leading. One day he proposed to his wife to go shooting, for he was an excellent shot and an indefatigable sportsman. Venturita made no objection as long as she could go with him, and so it was arranged. Therefore, one morning they went in search of a covey of partridges, the existence of which Gonzalo had been aware of since the day of his arrival at Tejada. But before they had gone half a mile from the house Venturita was quite done up, she could not take another step. Her husband, therefore, was obliged to carry her back in his arms, and forego his favorite pastime.

Dofia Paula, who had regarded the marriage with great aversion, did not make any allusion to visiting the bride and bridegroom until many days had elapsed. She then suggested to Pablito to accompany her, because she feared it would pain Cecilia to do so; but the girl quietly expressed her intention of also going to Tejada. So one afternoon the mother and daughter started off to the place in an open carriage; but on coming in sight of the well-known little stone towers, Cecilia turned pale—she felt a pain at her heart and she could hardly see; so when Dofia Paula saw her daughter's indisposition she gave orders to the coachman to turn back.

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"Poor girl!" she said, kissing her. "You see you cannot do it."

"I shall be able—I shall be able to," she returned, covering her eyes with her hand.

On the following day Doña Paula paid the visit, accompanied by Pablo, and she cordially invited the bride and bridegroom to leave the retired spot and to come to them in town, so this they did the following week.

Cecilia came down to the street door to receive the couple; she embraced and kissed her sister warmly, she gave her hand to Gonzalo, and kept it from trembling by a supreme effort of will; and the young man embraced her with a fraternal affection, thinking himself forgiven.

The bride and bridegroom were put in possession of the rooms that Doña Paula had destined for her eldest daughter, and, to all appearances, life resumed its peaceful course. Nevertheless, Gonzalo was sorry to see that they were not environed with that warm and genial atmosphere which adds so much to the comfort of the domestic hearth. Everybody was kind and attentive, from Don Rosendo down to the lowest servant; but no affection was shown them. Ventura did not notice it, or if she noticed it she did not much mind.

We must now turn to the more important business of the public life of Sarrio.

After that grand victory over the clergy, "The Light of Sarrio" resumed its successful and prosperous course. The boisterous, vehement harbormaster was able to continue his civilizing crusade without fear of any more ambushades. Sinforoso did not give up his post; however, he never went home without being accompanied by Maza or some other friend, both being well armed.

But Gabino Maza, who was always captious, knew

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how to make a malicious use of the rupture with the Church by appealing to the consciences of several of the townfolk. Not that he was a strict Catholic, or cared a rap whether the whole priestcraft were rooted up like parsley, or not, for his ideas had always been somewhat heterodox, and the clergy had long considered him beyond the pale, yet he was the one now to be shocked.

"After all," he said, "we have been brought up to respect religion, which is the only curb upon a town, and people cannot be allowed to ride roughshod over the sacred beliefs of our wives," etc.

These perfidious insinuations caused several people to give up their subscriptions to the paper.

The editor and the proprietor, who divined the source of the blow, were greatly indignant; but Gabino Maza, seconded by the no less irrepressible Delaunay, did not relax in his contentious campaign. If any of the staff of "*The Light*" were present nothing was said, but directly they left tongues wagged freely and furiously. Sometimes seriously and sometimes jokingly they discussed all who were concerned with the paper, more especially, as was only logical, its highest representative—the eminent Don Rosendo. They said (oh! disgraceful conduct!) that it was only the desire of seeing himself in print which had inspired him with the philanthropic movement of lighting the torch of progress in Sarrio; that Don Rufo, the doctor, was an impostor; Sinforoso, a poor thing—a broken reed to lean upon; Alvaro Peña (here the voices were lowered and furtive looks cast round), a blusterer without a spice of justice in him; Don Feliciano Gomez, a poor devil who had better look after his own not very flourishing affairs; Don Rudesindo, a great brawler who was only trying to let his storehouse and advertise his cider; and as to the

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originator and promoter of the enterprise, Don Rosendo, they said that he had always been a stupid fool, who had thought himself an author when in fact he understood nothing but the rise and fall of the price of codfish.

Only the imperious duty of acting as faithful and impartial chroniclers obliges us to record such remarks ; for of a truth it is much against the grain—the pen itself even seeming to revolt in one's hand against writing down such abominable things.

The backbiters abstained from speaking against Don Pedro Miranda because they had already asked him to withdraw from the periodical, which he seemed inclined to do after the skirmish with the clergy ; for Don Pedro was an old Christian, and a great friend of the Augustinian chaplain. The malignant remarks were successful in setting some of the influential ladies of the town against the paper, amongst whom was Doña Brigida ; so the foolish and degraded Marin went over to their side at the Club.

The dissentient side was also increased by the drunken alcalde, for a feeling of fellowship with the habitués of the café, and the vexation caused him by the constant excitement of the press, made him quickly retire from the great reform movement. That which finally set him against "The Light" and its staff was a paragraph in which the alcalde and the corporation were severely censured for the license they allowed the town police and the little they did to render Sarrio a pleasant seaside resort for distinguished scrofulous patients in the summer.

Although they outwardly behaved as friends, a veiled, silent enmity reigned among the chief habitués of the Club, and this increased day by day, thanks to the mischief-makers, who never cease on such occasions to air the differences and dislikes. Thenceforth they

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avoided quarrels and disputes because the angry cries and insulting terms which meant nothing in former days were now, thanks to the cordial dislike which existed among them all, fraught with much danger.

Therefore greater silence and more courtesy reigned in the resort, but it was accompanied with less frankness and cordiality. That strange state of feeling could not last long. Among people meeting every day and not being very cordial with each other, a quarrel is soon inevitable. It happened thus. There arrived at the saloon, no one knew how, a copy of a certain Catalonian illustrated paper, where, among other pictures, was one representing the banks of an American river, upon which a dozen crocodiles were disporting themselves. Maza had the paper in his hand when Rufo came up behind him and said in a jocular tone :

“ A lot of crocodiles, eh ? ”

“ They are not crocodiles,” returned Maza in a dry, disdainful tone, without raising his head.

“ And why are they not ? ” asked the doctor, wounded by the tone.

“ Because they are not.”

“ That is no reason.”

“ If you don't know, study ; I am not here to teach you for nothing.”

“ Chut ! The sage of Greece. Stand off, gentlemen ! ”

“ I am not a sage, but I say these animals are not crocodiles, for there are no crocodiles in the river Maranon.”

“ What are they, then ? ”

“ Alligators.”

“ Call them what you like ! Alligators and crocodiles are the same.”

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"Another atrocity! Where did you learn that?"

"Why, man, it is a well-known fact that the alligator and crocodile only differ in name. Here is Don Lorenzo, who has travelled, and can tell us whether it is not so."

"The alligator is rather smaller," observed Don Lorenzo, with a conciliatory smile.

"The size is of little consequence. The question is whether it has the same form or not."

Don Lorenzo nodded in sign of assent. Maza jumped up in a fury:

"But gentlemen! But gentlemen! Are we among cultivated people or among country clowns? Where do you find that crocodiles are the same as alligators? The crocodile is an animal of the Old World, and the alligator of the New."

"Excuse me, friend Maza, but I have seen crocodiles in the Philippines," returned Don Rudesindo.

"Well, and what if you have?"

"Because you say crocodiles don't belong to the Old World——"

"No more they do! Are not the Philippines in the New World? Gentlemen, gentlemen, open your umbrellas, for fooleries are raining down now."

"What? Do you mean to say that the Philippines are not in the other hemisphere?" asked Don Rudesindo, his face distorted with rage.

"Never mind; never mind; go on."

"The chief difference between the crocodile and the alligator," intervened Don Lorenzo in a tone of authority, "is that the crocodile has three rows of teeth, and the alligator only two."

"It is not so, sir; it is not so! Crocodiles have the same rows of teeth as alligators."

Don Lorenzo received this remark with indignation,

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and Don Rudesindo came to his support ; Maza, seconded by Delaunay, was not less furious in his attack. Several members of the Club soon joined in the dispute, which got warmer every minute. The voices were deafening. If they had had three rows of teeth like the crocodiles, or even two, I do not doubt that they would have devoured each other, seeing the rage and passion with which they showed the one set with which nature had endowed them. Maza was so aggressive and so insolent that at last Don Rudesindo, no longer master of himself, gave him a blow on the head with his umbrella. The subsequent conflict of sticks and umbrellas made a noise so terrible that it would have struck terror into the bravest heart. Several who had no recollection of having given any opinion on the teeth of the reptiles in question received their share of umbrella blows the same as those who had discoursed upon the subject. The master and several other people came up-stairs, the West Indians left off playing billiards, Don Melchor de las Cuevas, a person of influence in war as well as in peace, mediated between the combatants, and the disturbance was finally quelled, but it was some months before their tempers cooled down.

The result was, that from that day Gabino Maza, Delaunay, Don Roque, Marin, and three or four other members left the Club. Don Pedro Miranda only appeared between long intervals of absence, which made the remaining members and the staff of "The Light" see that they could not count upon him, and that it would not be long before he joined the other side, as indeed it came to pass. The dissenting party used to meet in the Café de Londres in the Calle de Caborana, but not many months later the news ran through the town that they had taken a storehouse in the Calle de San

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Florencio in which to hold their meetings ; and so it was. They had the floor boarded and carpeted, the walls and ceilings painted, and after furnishing it with several chairs and armchairs, they began going there as regularly as they had formerly gone to the Club. As the roof was low, and there was a ledge in the wall on which Marin used to take his siesta, the place soon went by the name of the Cabin in the town, and the name clung to it. The staff of "The Light" treated the deserters with scorn as long as they had no roof under which to assemble, but now the matter assumed importance, and the first symptom of fear was evinced in an article, or a screed in blank verse, describing the new meeting place, and bringing each of the members into notice under the names of different animals : Maza, a fish ; Delaunay, a crowing cock ; Marin, an ass ; Don Roque, a pig, etc. This exasperated the Cabin party in an inexpressible way. Don Rosendo became more and more pushing and active in his press campaign, and he essayed to introduce into "The Light" all the forms and customs that he noticed in the national and foreign press, more especially the French. He commissioned a clerk in Madrid to send him, every Wednesday, a telegram of twenty words, and moreover to write him political and literary letters. He translated all the foreign notices that appeared in periodicals, even those of fashion, courts of justice, and theatres ; but where he distinguished himself was in the market column. It is not easy to describe the cleverness with which he treated the subject of cereals, oils, spirituous liquors, rice, etc. To show the intelligence and brilliance he brought to bear on such a prosaic matter we must quote one of his paragraphs in which he wrote :

"Sugars, alive to these variations, remain low, and

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will not attain any permanent rise until coffees, cocoas, and all foreign produce restrain their violent oscillations." It was, in fact, the soul of the paper.

Nevertheless, he had not done enough to realize his ideal. Belinchon had always followed with the greatest interest the personal polemics of the Parisian press, which generally ended in a duel. And these proceedings afforded him such exquisite pleasure that no banquet could be more congenial and delightful to his taste. When several days passed without this excitement Don Rosendo languished. The descriptions of the assaults of arms among the celebrated fencers of the capital were of equal interest to him, and although he found the expressions *Engagement de sixte*, *Battement en quarte*, *Contre-riposte*, *Feinte*, etcetera, were somewhat confusing, he translated them in his own way, and pretended to be quite conversant with them. He said there was no surer sign of the state of the culture of a country than in its devotion to arms. The practice aroused and inspired the idea of human honor and dignity, and their abandonment brought dishonor and degradation. He knew better than their own relations the biography of all the great duellists and *gens des armes* in Paris, and he could give a detailed and minute description of all the duels that had taken place, with their accompanying wounds.

When an assault of arms was announced between two masters like Jacob and Grisier, our friend was greatly excited; he eagerly opened the "Figaro" every day, and mentally backed the one or the other.

One day in bed—his best ideas seemed always to come to him there—it occurred to him that to be a journalist without a knowledge of the use of arms was like being a dancer without the power of playing the castanets. One day, when least expected, a blow might fell him to the

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ground if he were ignorant of the art of parrying it. It was true that nobody in Sarrio was versed in the science of fencing, but then nobody was under a strong obligation to attain it. There might be some dispute between him and a journalist of Lancia or Madrid, and then he would have to let himself be assassinated! These thoughts led him to adopt the resolution of learning to use the foil at all costs. How? Why, by sending for a master to come to Sarrio, as he could not leave the place. Without communicating the idea to anybody, he wrote to a friend in Paris to look out in the *salles d'armes* for a teacher, or *prévôt*, who would be willing to expatriate himself. At the end of some time, such a one was found who, for the sum of two thousand francs a year, with the liberty of giving other lessons, would settle in the Biscayan town.

The news went forth that a professor of fencing, Monsieur Lemaire, had arrived in the schooner "Julia" for the sole purpose of teaching Don Rosendo the noble art of defence.

And, in fact, our friend was soon seen in the company of a slight, red-haired young man of foreign appearance. The people were horror-struck, for in a little town where blows with fists and sticks are given and taken the coldbloodedness, formality, and gravity of duels inspire horror and terror. They first thought that Don Rosendo wished to kill somebody, and it was only after some time that they understood the reason of the step. Don Rosendo entered into the matter with the ardor and gravity that it deserved. He devoted an hour every morning, and two more in the afternoon, to perfecting himself in lunging, which was all that the professor allowed him to do for the first two months. The most noteworthy result of this exercise was that at

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the end of some days he did not know whether his legs were his own, or whether they really belonged to another rational biped like himself. So sharp and strong were the pains to which he became subject, that even in his dreams he thought he was still lunging, and jumped up with cries of pain. Then Monsieur Lemaire was so cruel that he was never satisfied with the efforts made by the good gentleman. *Plus! plus! encore plus! Sapristi!*" and Don Rosendo had to stretch and strain himself to such a degree that he felt as if he were being sawed asunder. When the noble exercise was over Señor Belinchon, being nearly bowed to the ground with pain, was obliged to hold by the furniture to get from one room to another; and the noble founder of "The Light of Sarrio" walked henceforth to the end of his days as if he were bandy legged. But these tortures, similar to those endured by martyrs in Japan, he bore, if not with pleasure, with heroic endurance, as he remembered at what enormous sacrifices the improvement of oneself and one's country is attained.

At the end of two months the eternal *tic-tac* of the foils commenced: *Dégagez; coup droit; dégagez; un, deux; dégagez, doublez.*" But the torture of the legs was not herewith relaxed. Don Rudesindo, Alvaro Peña, Sinforoso, Pablito, the printer Folgueras, and several others took lessons at the same time. In the hall the fencers were so overwhelmed by their belligerent feelings that solemn silence reigned. Nothing was heard but the sharp voice of Monsieur Lemaire incessantly repeating in an absent fashion: *En garde vivement—Contre de quarte—Ripostez—Ah bien!—En garde vivement—Contre de sixte—Ripostez—Ah bien!—Parez seconde—Ripostu—Ah bien!* Don Rosendo thought he was transported to Paris, and he saw a Grisier, Anatole de

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la Forge, and the Baron de Basancour in Don Rudesindo, Folgueras, and Sinforoso.

"The Light" no longer seemed to be "The Light," but "Le Gaulois" or "Le Journal des Debats."

At the end of five months he was well versed in the art of self-defence; he could parry direct blows, he could attack with a shortened arm, and he could spring forward to perfection. He then thought the time had come for an *esclandre* to take place. It behooved the town to know that the two thousand francs expended on the professor had not been thrown away; besides, he wished to imbue the place with a taste for the refinements of the great capitals. But with whom in Sarrio could he pick a quarrel? However willingly he might quarrel with one of the members of the Cabin, he knew that the only one capable of fighting was Gabino Maza, and he held him somewhat in awe, especially since he had heard the professor say that one had to be very careful with violent men, even if they could not fence. After long and profound consideration he thought the best thing to do was to pick a quarrel with some journalist of Lancia through the discussion carried on by "The Light" with "The Future" about a particular branch road, and this plan he carried into execution. In the next number he showed himself so aggressive and so insolent to the paper of the capital that, surprised and indignant, it replied that certain remarks in "The Light" were only worthy of contempt. Whereupon Don Rosendo commissioned his friends, Alvaro Peña and Sinforoso Suarez, to take his challenge to the editor of "The Future." So the two gentlemen went to Lancia, and returned the same day.

On seeing them come back Señor Belinchon ardently hoped that the affair might have been amicably settled

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without the necessity of fighting, although he had been the one to demand satisfaction, which is a fresh proof of his singularly exalted soul and the exquisite sensibility with which he was endowed. Unfortunately, however, the editor of "The Future" had remained firm, and the seconds had arranged a duel with swords which was to come off the following day at an estate in the Lancian suburbs.

On learning this our hero felt his legs tremble, not with fear—that nobody would dare imagine—but with emotion at finding himself about to be the object of public curiosity and attention. As they were walking towards home, Peña said to him with rough frankness :

"The Villar party wanted to have the sword points blunted, but I said : 'I know Don Rosendo very well, and he is a man who abhors childishness; you cannot trifle with him. When one has to do with a quarrel like this it has to be treated seriously. I am certain that if we blunted the points there would be a row with him. Was not that what you would have said?'"

"Exactly. Many thanks, Alvaro," returned Señor Belinchon, giving him a hand which Peña found rather cold, and he added in a weak voice :

"But if the points were a trifle filed I would not mind agreeing to that. The affair, after all, does not precisely exact death."

"I did not dare to agree to it. Not knowing your opinion, I feared to vex you."

"Not at all—not at all. I would not mind their being filed."

"Well, now it can't be. The conditions are arranged and unless they suggest it again the points will have to be sharp. That will suit you, as you know how to use the foil."

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"And precisely for that reason I did not wish to take any unfair advantage of my adversary."

To this remark Peña gave a knowing wink.

"Don't be so scrupulous, Don Rosendo. If you can run him through *first!* like a little bird, don't hesitate to do so."

The officer accompanied these last words with an expressive pass in the air with the tips of his fingers, as if he were inserting them in a human body.

Don Rosendo made a gesture of repugnance, and after keeping silent for some time he said sullenly :

"What I fear is, that these cursed pains will not let me lunge properly."

"Tush ! man, don't trouble about that. You won't feel any pain in your legs during the duel. Haven't you ever found that a toothache goes away directly you arrive at the dentist's door to have it drawn ?"

This consolatory simile provoked a roar of laughter from the officer which lasted for some time, whilst Belinchon remained grave and depressed, as it behooves heroes to be on the eve of battle. The news of the approaching duel ran through the place like an electric shock. The excitement of the townsfolk was indescribable. It never entered anybody's head that a person advanced in years, with a married daughter, could cross swords with any one on the question of a branch road. Nevertheless Belinchon's party admired the firmness and bravery of their chief, who had a fearful nightmare that night. He dreamed that the sword of the editor of "The Future" cut him in two. The conqueror carried off one-half as a trophy, and only the other half returned to Sarrio. His cries awoke him, and filled Doña Paula with such alarm that she fetched the anti-spasm medicine. Belinchon, with the fortitude of heroic temper-

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aments, said nothing to his consort, but he took a dose of the mixture.

On the following day he went off to Lancia in a carriage, accompanied by Peña, Sinforoso, and Don Rufo, with two swords. Upon leaving the town more than a hundred persons were waiting in the road to see them off. Don Rosendo felt quite overcome.

“Good luck ! You’ll send a telegram, eh ? It shall not be said that Sarrio was beaten by Lancia.”

Don Rosendo pressed the hands of his partisans with emotion. They all offered to accompany him, and vowed vengeance in case of his perishing in the duel. At last they reached the appointed spot, and there they met the enemy.

The seconds conferred with each other, and the swords were produced and put into the hands of the combatants, whose faces had assumed the color befitting such solemn occasions, which is that of bottle-green varied with an orange hue. Once on the defensive, and the word of attack given, they both commenced brandishing the swords methodically, first on one side and then on the other, with a lugubrious, terror-striking sound. At the end of some time Villar ventured to raise his weapon with the intention of wounding his adversary’s head. But lo ! Don Rosendo gave such a prodigious leap backwards that the seconds looked at each other in astonishment. Villar, also surprised, waited for his adversary to return to the attack. The melancholy *tic-tac* recommenced ; Don Rosendo at the end of some time raised his sword, whereupon Villar instantly far exceeded his foe in the really supernatural bound he made backwards.

The seconds looked at each other in increased surprise, for they thought he would leap out of the field.

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The duel lasted in this way more than half an hour, during which Don Rosendo once cried :

“ Stop ! ”

“ What is it ? ” asked the seconds, approaching.

“ It seems to me that the other gentleman has blunted the point of his sword. ”

Then Villar's sword was inspected, and it was seen that it was not so.

This act of generosity, more befitting the Middle Ages than our own times, raised him, when it became known, in the public estimation to the dignity of the legendary heroes—Roldan, Bayard, and Bernardo del Carpio. The duel ended when Villar's sword quite unintentionally struck Belinchon's brow. It was a simple scratch, but the seconds considered it terminated the fight. Don Rufo stuck a large piece of English sticking-plaster on the wound. The wounded man nobly gave his hand to his adversary and despatched a telegram to Lancia to be sent to Sarrio. Then they all breakfasted cheerfully together ; and during the meal the champions expansively confided to each other the blows they had intended to administer, and which for lack of opportunity they had been powerless to give.

“ Why, man, if you had not prevented it in time I should have cut your head in two. With one or two feints at the face I should have given a thrust at your chest and a cut at your head, ” said Don Rosendo, swallowing a mouthful of cod.

“ Well, you would not have come off any better if I had carried out my intended line of attack, ” returned Villar. “ I should have raised my arm, ping ! I should have made a feint at your head, ping ! You were to aim at my arm, ping ! I to give you a cut at your face, ping !



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You to go for my head, ping ! I to parry and make for your arm, ping ! ”

Here the editor of “The Future,” of Lancia, who had been brandishing his fork and trying to swallow a fish-bone during the description of his proposed famous and complicated plan of action, now nearly choked and turned crimson. He had to be taken into the air, and Don Rosendo was the one to give him the sacred slaps upon his back to make him get rid of the fish-bone. Beautiful and striking example of chivalry that can never be forgotten !

The breakfast over, Don Rosendo and his companions entered the carriage, and repaired to Sarrio. More than half the population, apprised by the telegram, awaited them on the outskirts of the town. A cry of delight and enthusiasm burst from all throats on the approach of the carriage. Don Rosendo, much moved, put his head out of the window and took off his hat, which revealed the piece of English sticking-plaster. At the sight the people gave vent to a loud hurrah, and the vehicle was fairly mobbed by the crowd. After entering his house the acclamations were so great that the founder of “The Light” was obliged to appear at the window, where he was greeted with fresh enthusiasm.

That night his friends treated him to a serenade.

How Pablito Disports

CHAPTER XII

HOW PABLITO DISPORTS HIMSELF

"It would be as well to put a light curb on her."

"Oh! a bit," returned Piscis gravely.

Both were silent for some minutes, then Pablito exclaimed:

"Confounded mare! I never in my life saw such a sensitive mouth."

"Like silk," returned his friend in a tone of profound conviction.

Another pause.

"Do you think we ought to give her more of the spur?"

"The spur is never amiss with any animal," growled Piscis in the same decided tone.

"We must train her in trotting."

"It would be just as well."

During these remarks the two inseparable equestrians walked right across the town from the other end, where they had been in conclave in Don Rosendo's stables. It was ten o'clock at night; the air soft and springlike. The few people about were hastening homewards, and the only shops now open were those of popular resort, such as Graell's, Marano's, and the like. In the Cabin there was a great deal of light and excitement. Pablito, who shared his father's resentment in the matter, said to his friend, as they passed the abhorred club:

"Piscis, throw a stone at the door and break the glass."

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Thereupon Piscis, always aggressive, took up a flint from the road, waited for his friend to get round the corner, and then, zas! he flung it at the Cabin and shivered the window to atoms. Then he took to his legs, and for fear of being recognized by those who came out in search of him, he ran away on all fours with wondrous agility.

There were also some people in the Café de la Marina. They entered the place and quaffed in silence several glasses of chartreuse without it interfering with the active working of their brains.

On rising Pablito said:

"The best thing will be to put her in harness with Romeo."

"That is just what I was thinking," returned Piscis eagerly.

After leaving the café Pablito was asked, not in words, but with a horrible face, whither they were going.

"There."

"Good; then as I pass by my home I will make myself look a bit shabbier."

They left the principal streets, not without Piscis stopping a minute at his abode to alter his attire, and then they proceeded to the other end of the town, where the working classes mostly lived. They stopped in a certain street, as dull as it was dirty, in front of a poor-looking house with a rough stone balcony. Pablito looked carefully all round, and then gave a long, low whistle with the skill which distinguished him in this acquirement. Then casting an anxious look at the oil-lamp burning fifty steps off, he said:

"If we could but put out this light."

The terrible Piscis was again to the fore. He stepped to the corner of the wall, and there extinguished the

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light with his stick, of course breaking the glass at the same time.

A woman's form then appeared upon the balcony. Pablito jumped up to the iron grating of the window, and thence climbed noiselessly on to the balcony. Piscis meanwhile kept guard at the corner, armed with his formidable stick. Who was the woman who happened just then to be the object of the attentions of the Sultan of Sarrio? "The fair Nieves," those will reply who have followed the course of this story. Well, although we do not wish to run counter to the perspicacity of our readers, truth obliges us to declare that the young woman was not the fair Nieves, but the fair Valentina.

What! that prim needlewoman so averse to young gentlemen, and who, moreover, was betrothed to a young man named Cosme?

The same in body and soul, with her golden curls upon her forehead, her piquant frown, and her nose a little *retroussé*. Pablito was the man to cause this sort of upset. Whilst he was courting, or pretending to court Nieves, he was trying the ground with Valentina. But she was more obdurate than the other. The first kiss that he gave her upon the neck was when she was drinking some water in the kitchen. The angry embroideress called it disgraceful; she turned as red as a cherry, her expressive eyes shone with rage, and she cried:

"Take care, for I won't stand such ways! Get along, and try them on with those that like them."

By this she doubtless meant Nieves. Pablito proceeded more cautiously henceforth, but not with less audacity. He did not seem to object to her brusque manners; he joked with her, and he patiently bore with her spitfire ways, for Valentina was a type of the artisan



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in Sarrio whose want of culture seemed merely an additional charm. The trousseau of Ventura being finished, there were no more opportunities of meeting, so Pablito made use of the public balls to lay siege to her.

Not that he had abandoned Nieves. The gay young fellow guessed that the self-love excited by rivalry would do more in his favor than even the personal charms with which he was endowed. This perspicacity was innate in him, and had been clearly shown from the first time he paid attention to any of the fair sex, which is an additional argument for those who believe in the pre-existence of the human being; because it could only be by having laid siege to several sempstresses in a previous state of existence that our young friend could have such clear ideas as to the course of action that would prove successful.

At last the conquest was made.

She began by giving up her young man, and she ended by making evening appointments like the present one with the gallant Pablito.

"Is your father asleep?" was the first question that he asked when he appeared on the balcony.

"What is that to you?" returned the severe sempstress.

"Well, if he is not asleep, you see, by jingo! the thing is serious."

"Hold your tongue, coward, or I will make it hot for you; I will make a disturbance for the pleasure of seeing you run."

Here Pablito caught her in his arms and kissed her effusively. The young girl smiled with delight, but she soon frowned, and her whole physiognomy expressed great displeasure.

"Go away, go away!" she said, pushing him off.

How Pablito Disports

"I have something to ask you. Where were you this morning?"

"This morning? In several places—at home, at the Club, in the stables, at the end of the landing-stage."

"Were you not in the Calle de San Florencio?"

"Yes, I passed by there two or three times."

"And whom did you meet there?"

"How should I know? Several people."

"Didn't you meet Nieves?" asked the pretty sempstress with suppressed rage.

"Why, yes, I did meet her," he returned in a careless tone.

"And you did not stop her?"

"No, I simply said good-day."

"Fool! hypocrite! story-teller!" Valentina exclaimed with fury. "Take that, you ass!" giving him a terrible pinch on his arm. "You only said 'Good-day' to her, and yet you were a whole hour with her! Take that, you deceiver! Take that!"

Upon this she gave him so many pinches that the wretched Pablo was doubled up with pain, whilst powerless to utter a sound out of respect for the slumbers of the father of the vixenish girl.

"Stop, Valentina! for goodness' sake. You are indeed mistaken. I only stopped a minute to ask her if she had finished hemming my handkerchiefs."

"It was no such thing! You stood there for a good hour together, laughing like mad! I felt inclined to strangle you with my own hands, you fool! you fool! you more than fool!"

The enraged girl, now maddened with fury, laid her hands on the neck of her adorer, as if about to strangle him.

Her heart, however, was touched at seeing such a

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handsome, fine young fellow with his eyes distended with terror; in fact, Valentina took pity on him and let him go, but not without giving his arms several additional pinches.

"You don't deceive me, you know; you don't deceive me! If I find that you are with her again I won't have anything more to do with you."

"All right, I promise not to speak to her any more; but don't go and believe the first story you hear about me."

"Will you promise?" asked the obdurate sempstress, looking at him in a relentless way.

"Never fear."

"Well, you will have to settle with me if you don't keep your word. Come."

This was the calm and tender mode of Valentina's dealings with the young swell of Sarrio; and when he gave Piscis, or any other friend, an account of them, he smiled like a man of the world, and declared that these irascible, imperious women are most attractive to men, especially if, like himself, they were somewhat *blasés*.

After they had made peace, or, to speak more correctly, after Valentina had come to terms, there was a whispered conversation which lasted for some time. Then nothing more was heard, and one was led to suppose that the balcony was vacated. If it were not very ugly to cast a slur on a girl's reputation, one might have suspected that the loving couple had retired to the interior of the house. Piscis meanwhile kept guard, walking up and down the street; and the fact was, he was not the only one so occupied, for a man was posted ever since their arrival in the corner of a doorway, where the shadows were darkest. Motionless and protected by the gloom, he was invisible to Piscis. Profiting by a

How Pablito Disports

moment when the back of the latter was turned to the house, the man issued from his hiding-place, and cautiously approached it. He looked at the balcony and hesitated a few seconds. This hesitation caused his failure. By the time he jumped up to catch hold of the bars the terrible Piscis turned and saw him. With two strides he was under the balcony before the intruder could swing himself up to it, and his famous stick came down with such force on the shoulders of the poor man that he loosened his hold on the bars and measured his length with the street. The wrathful centaur was about to repeat the blow, when the fellow jumped up with such agility and fled away so swiftly that the second blow struck the ground, and he did not attempt a third.

"Confound it!" cried Piscis.

This exclamation must have reached the ears of his happy friend, for a few seconds later he appeared on the balcony and swung himself into the street.

"What is it?" he asked, approaching his friend.

"A man."

"Where?" asked the cavalier, turning round two or three times.

"He has escaped now. I caught him just as he was about to scale the balcony, and I knocked him down with my stick. Then he took to his heels. By Jove! Romeo couldn't have beaten him in speed."

"This man," returned Pablo gloomily, "must be an old lover of Valentina's. What is to be done?"

"Then, if he be a lover, I don't know what he could be here for, unless it was to give you a licking."

Pablito threw his arm round his friend's shoulder, not to support himself, although his legs trembled somewhat, but to say, in a low voice:

"Do you think so?"

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"One—or two, or three."

The handsome young man was silent. At the end of a minute he said:

"Do you know him?"

"I? No; and you?"

"I have never seen him; I only know that he is named Cosme, and that he is a barber."

They left the street in silence, and in silence they arrived at Belinchon's house. There, on taking leave of each other, Pablito said to his friend:

"If I go there again, which I doubt, will you do me the kindness not to lose sight of the balcony, eh?"

"I should rather think so," was the laconic reply of the indomitable Piscis.

The following day was Sunday, and the usual weekly ball took place at the school. They danced in the afternoon from three to seven. The room was spacious, having been built a few years ago as a school for children. The benches were piled up on the teacher's platform; the walls were covered with maps and proverbs, and as the followers of Terpsichore danced the languid *habanera*, they could amuse themselves by reading a portion of the invaluable exhortations tending to show that virtue and labor are the true treasures of childhood: "The studious child will receive the reward of his industry"; "Truth and perseverance are superior to talents." And there at the end over the master's table was the image of Christ crucified (oh, blasphemy!), mounted on a silken background, in the presence of these wild polkas and voluptuous dances.

It was there that, without fear of rain or sun, strangers could court and admire the young girls of Sarrio. And, in truth, all the captains and pilots who visited the town took care to frequent the place. Occasionally

How Pablito Disports

their admiration led them to overstep the bounds of British gravity, and their fair beards came too near to the face of some beauty.

"Are you mad, Christian?" she would ask, as she pushed him away.

"Christian! Christian!" the Englishman repeated in astonishment. "What is being a Christian?"

"Goodness, man, don't you know the doctrine? Well, learn it then."

It would be about five or six in the evening, after four or five waltzes and as many polkas had been danced, that these ladies were so charming. The well-circulated blood tinged their cheeks with a bright color; their fair or dark locks, in pretty disorder, floated in the air or fell in adorable curls upon their shoulders; their eyes shone like stars in those heavenly faces, and those ruddy, luscious, half-opened lips revealed immaculate rows of teeth.

But enough, or we shall never finish; albeit in our admiration of the working-girls of Sarrio we are outdone by every Englishman who comes hither.

There was always a sameness in the feminine element of these balls, for it was entirely composed of young girls of the same rung of the social ladder. But there was a dangerous variety in the masculine element, for it consisted of the young gentlemen as well as the young artisans of Sarrio. Thus the artisans considered that their rights were encroached upon by the rival charms of the young gentlemen, and the repeated unequal marriages that took place in the town showed how they had been ousted.

As already remarked, the West Indians were generally satisfied with the somewhat poor and faded young ladies of the place, but the young men were more taken with

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the charms of the working-girls. Thus the poor artisans and sailors were outdone by the gentry. What were they to do?

They found some consolation in visits to the taverns, and in the use of their sticks, which made every ball the scene of a shower of blows, and two or three gentlemen generally left the school with broken heads on a Sunday.

Pablito had come off pretty well hitherto, thanks to his most faithful Piscis, who undertook to receive the blows intended for him. The only inconvenience he suffered at the majority of these gatherings was the loss of his hat, and this happened so repeatedly that he was quite certain that they picked a quarrel with him to make him lose it. When an artisan wanted a hat he knew how to get one.

But Piscis could not save him from the blows he received that Sunday; and this not from want of will on the part of the centaur, but because there are things that really cannot be done. With what care did that gallant youth twist the ends of his mustache before his looking-glass! How he dressed his cheeks with a cream he had sent for from Madrid, and what havoc was made of his toilet an hour afterwards!

He walked across the room, looking so handsome and so attractive that it was a pleasure to see him as he cast his eyes from one side to another, as all men well versed in his accomplishments are prone to do. Occasionally on passing a young lady he would say, "Pretty as ever, Julia!" or else, "Your eyes are killing"; or, "Torquata, there's no one to come up to you in Sarrio," or any other remark flattering to a girl. But whilst saying these things he maintained his gravity of demeanor, as he was aware that it was one of his most irresistible charms.

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He waited for Valentina for some time, but the room was full of ladies, and the brass orchestra had played two dances without the pretty sempstress making her appearance. The strains of a mazurka began, the *jeunesse dorée* encircled the slender waists of the working-girls, but Pablito, faithful to the absent, stood idle, looking on at the swift couples as they passed before him.

The mazurka over, he began to think that Valentina would not come. In the sudden way he seized an idea he was very like his father, particularly when flushed with wine, so that in a few minutes he was quite convinced of the fact. This sudden fancy happened to be coincident with the entrance into the room of the fair Nieves. Their eyes met, and the poor girl, shamefully neglected for nearly two months, smiled sweetly at him. This sweetness had been precisely the cause of her failure, for the self-sufficient Pablito soon wearied of sweet women. Nevertheless, he returned the smile, and on coming to her side, he said, teasingly:

"Are you going to frighten the bulls, Nieves?"

The embroideress wore a scarlet sash at her waist, and this remark of her ex-admirer so flustered her that she could not reply. She smiled again, and said, "Ah!" "Yes," "No," and uttered a few more words that we do not remember, and looked as if she would faint with emotion. The next time he came across her he asked if she would like to dance the first polka with him. "The first, the second, the third, and all the polkas in the world," returned Nieves, with trembling lips. Pablo was filled with remorse after having engaged himself for the polka. "What a fool, what a brute I am! And suppose Valentina comes in now!"

But she did not come. The orchestra struck up the opening bars, and the youth, without turning his eyes

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from the door, encircled the waist of the embroideress and dashed rapidly into the centre of the room. Other young people, no less rapid, dashed from the opposite side, and then ensued one shock, then another, and then another. Such collisions formed the chief attraction of these balls, and the young girls, instead of being angry at nearly losing their footing and having their hair tumbled, laughed with infinite pleasure. Pablo and Nieves, who could not take four turns without colliding with another couple, were perfectly charmed. Nevertheless, the young man felt his legs tremble whenever he passed the door, and he always left it as quickly as possible. When the orchestra had finished he took his partner to a corner of the room and then sat down a minute, and Pablito felt a spark of feeling glow in the ashes of his love for that girl so cheerful, so good-tempered, and so affectionate.

"Yes, I wanted to dance with you, Nieves," he said as he wiped his brow with his handkerchief.

"And I with you, Pablo."

"You?"

The girl blushed.

"Do you say you instead of thou now?"

"It is now so long ago."

"You are right. But see, I have not forgotten."

"On Wednesday I saw you—I saw you in the Nieva road—you were on a white horse."

"It was a mare."

"I thought it would throw you."

"Throw me!" exclaimed Pablito, slightly frowning. "It was a bit fresh, child; a mare does not throw me so easily."

"But it reared up so! It almost stood upright. Goodness, how frightened I was!"

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"I was teaching it to step high," returned the youth, with a smile of superiority. "As she has not been worked before she resisted a bit. Sometimes her mouth seems too tender, but taking her all round, Linda is a fine creature. Look here, when I bought her, or, rather, when I changed Negress—and she cost me over and above 1,500 reales—for her last October, she had a temper, indeed; she stuck in the middle of the road, she shied at the carts and carriages—in short, she was an impossible creature, and I said to myself: 'What is to be done with this mare?'"

Pablito, in whose heart the girl had touched a sensitive chord, talked long and brilliantly on his equestrian deeds. Nieves listened with rapturous delight, thinking that behind the minute description of Linda's peccadilloes she was going to find her lost love.

But suddenly the orator (pof!) received a blow in the middle of his face, the listener (pof!) received another, and before they had recovered from their surprise they received two more—pof! pof!

The choleric Valentina was the author of this attack, and in less than a minute she had overwhelmed them with blows.

Pablito had nothing for it but to make his escape as gracefully as he could and retire to the street. Nieves remained like an innocent dove in the clutches of a vulture, until Valentina, seeing she could go no further, as her arms were seized by some of the party, quickly tore herself free, left the room, where the next dance was about to commence, and rushed into the street.

Pablito was walking slowly, still feeling quite stunned, when he felt a terrible pain in his arm. Being quite accustomed to that kind of torture, he said, without turning his head:

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"Valentina!"

"It is I! Do you think you are going to make me a laughing-stock?"

"What you have just done is very ugly," replied the youth in an angry tone, and looking his beloved in the face. "You have made a scandal, and you have made me ridiculous. I will not tolerate that, do you hear?"

"You won't tolerate it? Well, look here, if I see you again with her I will not be contented with what I did to-day—I will strike at you both with a knife."

"But I won't allow you to do anything of the sort; neither will I have you speak to me when I am with another girl!" cried the young man, more and more infuriated.

"Not when I see you with that cat! We'll see about that, we'll see!"

Then the handsome youth, justly enraged and oblivious in his fury of all the laws of gallantry, discharged a blow at the face of his dear one, and then another, and then another, until, in fact, she had a regular buffeting. The pretty sempstress patiently submitted to this treatment of her admirer without evincing the slightest sign of resistance, nor even of avoidance of the blows. When Pablito had finished, she said, with delightful naturalness:

"Have you done now?"

"For the present, but I shall have to do it again!" roared the young man, blind with rage.

"Well, you can do it whenever you like, and I will bear it all without moving; but, beat me or not, I have told you what I shall do if I find you talking with her again. Now take me back to the ball."

"I don't want to."

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"Very well; then take me somewhere else where I can put my hair straight, for you have quite dishevelled it."

The youth had to obey, and so he escorted her to the Star Café, thinking on the way that he had to pay rather dearly for his conquests.

A few days later he had still greater reason to come to that conclusion. It was at the Madrileña barber's where he frequently went to be shaved and have his hair cut.

Accompanied by his chief equerry, he had entered the place and taken a seat on the sofa to await his turn.

"At your pleasure, sir," said a pale young man with a slight black mustache, looking across at him as he turned a seat round.

Pablito went forward in an absent sort of way, and dropped into the armchair with the languid grace adopted by those endowed by Providence with great superiority.

The lad covered his face with soap, and the Belinchon youth, with his proud head thrown back, waited with majestic calm for the dark hue covering his cheeks to be removed. He kept his eyes closed so as better to enjoy the vague poetic thoughts passing through his mind, for his head was always full of ideas on leaving the stable. His legs were stretched out comfortably under the table, and his gloved hands hung lazily from the arms of the chair.

"Fernando," said the barber, who was about to shave him, to one of his companions.

"What do you want, Cosme?"

This name made Pablito tremble without knowing why; he opened his eyes, and gave a long look at the hairdresser. He did not know him, he was a new hand



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in the establishment; but this, instead of calming him, made him change his position several times, with a loss of his habitual ease and languor.

"Can you give me the razor that was sharpened to-day?"

"Here it is."

Fernando stretched out his hand and gave the razor to Cosme. A vague desire to rise from his seat now came into Pablito's mind, but before he could do so the barber had taken him by the nose and was proceeding to shave him.

At the end of some minutes, during which our friend, from under his long eyelashes, followed with some alarm the movements of the barber's hand, Cosme said to him, in a low voice, whilst his lips wreathed with a forced smile which much enlarged his mouth:

"You are Señorito Belinchon, eh?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"I have known you for some time," continued the barber, still with the same voice and smile. "Oh, yes, for a long time. You don't know me, that's evident. Gentlemen don't take much notice of us. I often see you about here on horseback, and sometimes on foot, and I frequently notice you at the balls at the school. You dance very well, sir, very well."

"Tush!" returned Pablito, whose desire to rise was now quite overwhelming.

"Yes, very well; and, moreover, you know how to choose a partner. Caramba, sir, what pretty girls you always take, sir! Some months ago you were always dancing with a red-haired girl. She is the sister of a friend of mine. But now you are always dancing with one prettier still—Valentina. Caramba, what a good eye you have, sir! I have known this Valentina since

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I was a boy—we were friends at one time. Haven't you heard her talk of me—of Cosme?"

"No," murmured the youth, who was breaking out into a cold sweat.

"Well, that's strange, as we were great friends—so great that three months ago we were going to be married. But then you came along, sir, and all was over."

Cosme uttered these last words in a tremulous voice. Pablito had now great cold drops of sweat upon his brow.

Like his illustrious father, Pablo had a horror of treachery and deceit.

"Of course, what could one expect?" continued the barber, with the uncertain tone of voice divided between the desire to laugh or to weep, and at the same time he dexterously passed the razor across the throat of the gay Lothario to do away with a few encroaching hairs. "Of course a young gentleman of the upper class like you can soon oust a rough fellow like me. Girls lose their heads directly one of your sort whispers sweet nothings in their ears. They do it to amuse themselves, when it is for nothing worse. It is too well known that you have no intention of marrying Valentina. You like to spend your evenings with her on the balcony, eh? And then you'll forget her. But I truly loved the girl."

The barber's voice trembled again, and his hand also shook; but Pablito was motionless, he was petrified.

"But now," continued Cosme, "who would marry her but a madman? We poor are beneath you, and we have to bear these things. If you had been my equal we would have met on fair ground. But if I attacked you I should soon have my head broken and be put into prison. And yet," he continued after a moment's

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silence, in a hoarser tone, "if I now went suddenly mad, sir, farewell to horses and carriages, farewell to balls, farewell to Valentina ; just by a slight stroke with this razor—pif!—and all would be over forever——"

Pablito, whose face was now as white without the soap as it had been with it, then uttered such a cry of horror and misery that Piscis, whose eyes had been suspiciously fixed upon the barber, now jumped up suddenly and caught him by the arms; Pablo sprang from his seat, and the master and all his employees cried out simultaneously:

"What is it?"

"Seize the assassin!" exclaimed Pablito, springing upon Cosme, who was as pale as death under his arrest. In one instant the gay young man, still cold with fear, told them what had happened, and poor Cosme was kicked out of the shop by the master, who did not wish to lose the best customer in the town.

Secrets Revealed

CHAPTER XIII

SOME SECRETS OF GONZALO'S LIFE ARE REVEALED

GONZALO, recollecting that the blister had not been attended to which had been put on him the previous day, rang the bell violently. He was lying on his back in bed, gazing at the arabesques on the ceiling, the room being well lighted by two windows. He was not in his own bed-room, but in his sitting-room, where a bed was put up the first day he was taken ill. Ventura had objected to leaving their room, and as they could not both be there he had been the one to move. The illness had proved as serious as it was sudden—it was erysipelas, causing inflammation in his face, hands, and legs, which had nearly cost him his life.

It had been kept from his head by strong applications to his legs, and the doctor put blisters on various parts of his body.

“What do you want, sir?” said the maid, half opening the door.

“Be so kind as to ask my wife to come.”

At the end of a minute the servant reappeared, and said:

“She is coming directly.”

The young man waited, and in ten minutes' time the fair head of his wife appeared at the door.

“What do you want, my love?” she asked without coming in, and in a tone too careless to accord with the tenderness of the words.



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"Come in. It is eleven o'clock, and the blister has not been attended to yet."

"I thought you would wait for the doctor to do it," she said as she hesitatingly entered the room, resplendent in a magnificent blue silk dress.

"He did not say he would come and take it off; besides, it hurts me very much."

The girl approached the bed, and after a few moments' silence she put her hand upon her husband's head and said:

"Won't it be better to wait for the doctor to do it?"

"No, no," he returned, now fairly cross; "it is hurting very much. Fetch the lint and the ointment and a pair of sharp scissors."

Ventura left the room without replying, and soon returned with the necessities in her hand. She looked grave and seemed absent, whilst her face betrayed her aversion to attendance at the sick-bed.

After she had put the things on the little table by the bedside, and spread some ointment upon the lint with a knife, the young wife said softly:

"Come along."

Gonzalo raised himself in bed, and opening his shirt, he exposed his herculean chest, on the right of which there was the blister. The wife leaned forward to raise the linen rag, and Gonzalo profited by the occasion to kiss her forehead.

Nothing was said. The blister was large, and surrounded by a circle of inflamed flesh. Ventura straightened herself and said, with her usual want of feeling:

"Bah, bah, we had better wait for the doctor; he won't be late. If you like we will send him a message."

"I have said no," returned the young man, frowning angrily. "Take the scissors and snip the blister all

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round, then put the linen on the wound, and it is done. You see, it is very easy."

Ventura did not answer. She took the scissors, and bending over him again, she began to snip the blister.

"Does it hurt you?"

"It is nothing; go on."

But when the wound was disclosed to view the girl could not repress a gesture of repugnance, which did not escape her husband's sight; so that his eyes darkened and his forehead corrugated with angry lines.

"Look here, stop, stop. We will wait for the doctor to come," he said, taking hold of her gently, but firmly, by the wrist.

Ventura looked at him in surprise.

"Why?"

"Never mind; go away, go away," he returned quickly, fastening his shirt, and drawing up the bed-clothes about him.

Ventura stood with the scissors in her hand and looked at him fixedly in astonishment. Her husband lay with the frown still upon his forehead and with his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"But why? What have I done to you, boy?"

"Nothing, nothing, only go and let me be."

The girl stood looking at him a few more minutes, and then flying into a rage, she dashed the scissors on the ground and said in the angry, haughty tone she knew so well how to give to her words when she liked:

"I am glad of it, for the spectacle was not very pleasant, especially just before dinner."

Then, as she turned her steps towards the door, Gonzalo retorted, with a sarcastic smile:

"And I am glad to have afforded you this pleasure."

When left alone the young man's eyes flamed with

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fury, his lips trembled, he crumpled the sheet with twitching fingers, and he broke into a torrent of awful interjections peculiar to the brief and terrible rages of men of sanguine temperament.

Before he had completely got over his excitement he heard a soft tap at the door, and thinking it was his wife, he called out angrily:

"Who is it?"

The person who had knocked, alarmed doubtless by the tone of his voice, waited a minute before replying. At last a soft voice said:

"It is I, Gonzalo."

"Ah, excuse me, Cecilia. Come in," he returned, suddenly mollified. His sister-in-law opened the door, came in, and carefully shut it behind her.

"I came to know how you are, and to tell you that if you want the lemonade it is ready made."

"I am better, thank you. If I keep on like this I shall be able to get up to-morrow or next day."

"Has the blister been taken off?"

"Ventura began doing it just now, but she did not finish," he replied, as a frown again darkened his brow.

"Yes, I just met her in the passage, and she told me that you were cross because you thought the task was repugnant to her," said Cecilia, smiling kindly.

"It is not that, it is not that," returned the young man in an impatient tone and somewhat shamefacedly.

"You must forgive her, for she is not accustomed to these things. She is but a child. Besides, in her state of health she is easily upset."

"It is not that!" repeated the young man with increased impatience, and slightly raising his head from the pillows. "I should be very stupid and very selfish if I were to put myself out for something which, after

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all, she cannot help. That is a matter of temperament, and I am accustomed to bear it in mind, especially as it is a question of my wife, and she is not well. But it is more than that, and this is the last straw that breaks the camel's back. I have now been in bed ten days and she has not entered the room more than two or three times a day, and those occasions were generally when I sent for her. Do you think that is how a husband ought to be treated by a wife? If it had not been for you and for mamma—especially you—I should have been left to servants, like in a hospital."

"Oh, no, Gonzalo."

"Yes, yes, Cecilia," he returned emphatically, and raising himself up, "abandoned. My wife only appears when anybody comes to see me. Then, yes, she comes sweeping in, redolent with perfumes and blazing with colors. But as to bringing me tisanes, carrying out the doctor's orders, or keeping me company a while by reading or talking—nothing of the sort. Just now I begged her to take off the blister for me, and even as I mentioned it her whole face changed. She began by making excuses to avoid doing it, and it was only when I insisted on it that she made up her mind to do it, but with such a bad grace and with such a cross face that I felt inclined to tear the things out of her hand. I should not have had a spark of dignity or self-respect if I had let her go on."

In his increasing excitement Gonzalo quite raised himself up in bed, and Cecilia stood in the middle of the room listening to him in dismay and distress, without knowing what to reply. She wanted to defend her sister, but she had no arguments weighty enough to contravene those of her brother-in-law.

"Gonzalo," she said at last, with a serene face and



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in a firm voice, "the pain you have had has somewhat excited you, and prevented your seeing things as they really are. It is possible that Ventura has been rather neglectful of her duties, but be quite assured that it was not from lack of will. I know her well, and I know that her character is not one to lend itself to the consideration and care required by an invalid. She is not fit for a sick nurse. Besides, we must recollect that her present state of health excuses her from many things."

"But if it be so in everything, Cecilia; if it be so in everything?" returned the young man, both crossly and quickly. "If she be an empty-headed girl? The only thing of any importance in the world to her is herself—her beauty, her dresses, her jewels; all the rest—father, mother, brother, sister, and husband, all go for naught. I am certain she has been more interested in her hat from Paris than in my illness."

"Oh, don't say that, for goodness' sake! You are mad."

"I am not mad, it is the simple truth."

And in rapid, stirring tones, frequently interrupted by the intensity of his anger, he laid bare his troubles, seeming to take pleasure in reopening the wounds he had received in his matrimonial life. Ventura had a character diametrically opposed to his. It was not possible to get on with her for more than an hour, because when there was peace, and no cause for dispute, she did not rest until she had found one, doubtless for the pleasure of making up the quarrel again. If he did anything to give her any enjoyment, instead of thanking him she only acknowledged it by some joke or sarcasm. Nothing seemed of any importance to her, and his greatest sacrifices were of no account. It was impossible to make her think of anything beyond her

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dressess, perfumes, and ribbons. What a life she led him those three months she spent with him in Madrid! They were continually visiting drapers, jewellers, and dressmakers. The evenings were invariably spent at the play, and however much his head ached, or however tired he was, he had to appear in some box at the Royal or Prince's theatre.

The money they spent there amounted to a considerable sum. He thought he had provided himself with sufficient funds, but he had been obliged to send home three times for more. Then seeing that his income would not suffice him for this style of living, especially if he had several children, he thought of starting a brewery, and thus turn to account the study he had given the subject. But Ventura firmly set her face against such a proceeding, saying that she declined being "a brewer's wife."

He was certain that the bad state of his blood, which had brought on the sudden attack of erysipelas, was due to the life he had led at Madrid and subsequently in Sarrio. This was quite evident, for he required a life of activity and work, an outdoor life with shooting and riding; his plethoric temperament required exercise, and the sedentary life which suited Ventura, with the eternal theatre and visits, and long evenings without food, were death to him, and his blood became as thick as oil. But what did all that signify to her? All she cared about was to please herself once and for all. In Madrid she had learnt to use rouge—an atrocious thing, because she was naturally as white as milk; but although he had impressed upon her several times the horror that he had of the fashion, she paid no attention to him.

Whilst Gonzalo unburdened himself in this uninterrupted torrent of words his face successively expressed



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the indignation, sadness, anger, and disappointment with which the recollection of his sufferings filled him. His great athletic form moved convulsively on the bed, sometimes raising itself and at other times throwing itself back, whilst his trembling, clenched hands mechanically pulled up the bed-clothes which his excitement continually disarranged. Cecilia listened with her head bent and her hands clasped, hoping that his temper would calm after the disburdenment of his troubles. And so it was, for when he had thoroughly exhausted himself he drew the sheet up to his eyes, and only gave vent to a series of interminable groans mingled with a few incoherent utterances.

Then Cecilia said, in a very soft voice:

"I don't know what to say to all this, Gonzalo. It is always very dangerous to meddle with matrimonial disagreements; and if any one ought to interfere about yours it is not for me, but for mamma. But I have always heard that all marriages have trials and troubles at the commencement, until the characters become moulded to each other. But such troubles go by like clouds in summer; as long as the hearts are united little differences are of little consequence. And fortunately there is no fear about that in this case—you love Ventura."

"Oh, more and more every day!" he exclaimed, angry with himself. "I am in love like an ass! Yes, yes, like an ass!"

A shade of sorrow, swift as lightning, passed over Cecilia's clear eyes, but they instantly resumed their usual serene brightness.

"And she also loves you, don't doubt it. Her disposition is light, perhaps somewhat capricious, because she has always been the spoilt child of the house; she is

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incapable of bearing malice, but she acts without thinking, on the impulse of the moment. Besides, Gonzalo," she added, smiling, "recollect you owe her especial consideration just now, and even additional tenderness, if it be possible."

Then the girl in delicate language touched upon the future child, the bond that would indissolubly solder the union of their hearts. This child, for which the whole house was now working, would dissipate with its innocent smile the clouds that threatened to momentarily darken the love of its parents. Once it is in the world, what time will Venturita have for rouge! No; she will have enough to do to tend it, feed it, and soothe it when fretful. And the father will be so taken up with it that he will not have time to notice what dress his wife had donned, or whether she was in a good or bad humor. Cecilia's voice, soft and persuasive, albeit somewhat hesitating, which gave a peculiarly touching and humble effect to her tones, was enough to melt anybody's heart, and her brother-in-law's was not proof against it.

He suddenly calmed down, and his face expanded with a smile as he interrupted her by saying:

"Child, what a good barrister you would make!"

"It is because I am in the right," she replied, laughing.

"And if you were not, you would make yourself so. Well, well, it is over now! My tempers don't last long, and particularly when you begin to speak I am done for. No orator can come up to your way of accumulating arguments on your own side. Fancy bringing in the child!"

Cecilia could not forbear laughing.

"Confess that you missed no point."

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"I don't deny it."

And both laughed merrily, joking each other affectionately, in the brotherly and sisterly way that delighted them.

At last Cecilia was about to take her departure. But before reaching the door she turned and asked, with a timidity which betrayed her strong concern on the subject:

"Would you like me to take off the blister? It must hurt you."

The young man hesitated an instant, fearful of offending his sister-in-law's delicacy.

"If you like. There is no necessity. Perhaps it will be disagreeable to you."

But Cecilia had already approached the bed and put the lint, ointment, and scissors in order. She cut a fresh piece of lint and carefully spread the ointment upon it. Gonzalo watched her somewhat shyly. She kept silent in her heroic efforts to overcome the confusion which nearly overwhelmed her. She was indeed repenting her suggestion, and she spent some minutes passing the knife numberless times over the lint, with downcast looks, feigning engrossing attention to the task. At last, with a supreme effort she took up the lint, and raising her eyes to her brother-in-law, she said, with assumed indifference:

"Are you ready?"

Gonzalo with a hesitating hand pushed back the bed-clothes, and proceeded to unfasten his nightshirt slowly and shyly, until he had uncovered his muscular chest.

"Nice sight before dinner!" he exclaimed shamefacedly, repeating the remark expressed by his wife.

Cecilia did not reply, but proceeded to examine the wound still half covered with the blister that Ventura

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did not finish removing. Then she took the scissors, and with a firm hand she snipped away what remained of it.

"Do I hurt you?" she asked.

"Not at all."

When the wound was laid bare, as large as the palm of one's hand, she gently laid the lint upon it, passed her hand several times over it to adjust it, put some linen over the lint, and without leaving off the pressure with her left hand, she took a band from the little table to keep the plaster in its place.

Then it was necessary to get the bandage round his back so as to tie it in front.

"Can't you do it?" he said, laughing nervously.

She did not reply, for she wished by her gravity to overcome the confusion to which she was a prey. She only betrayed her emotion by the slight trembling of her lips. Her eyes, half closed, shone under her long lashes with a real intense pleasure which the grave and quiet expression of her face could not conceal.

Gonzalo tried to cross the strings behind him, but it was impossible, and Cecilia came to his assistance. Her hand slightly trembled as it touched the young man's form, but she did not shrink from the performance of her task.

"A fine chest, eh?" he said with affected unconcern, to hide the embarrassment from which they were both suffering.

"It is rather," returned Cecilia.

"Don't think it is quite natural. I got these arms and chest by rowing on the Thames."

"Rowing?"

"Yes, rowing. The richest youths there don a sailor's vest or shirt, and indeed it is considered fashionable to do so on the water. What trips we had down that river!

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Then every now and then there was a regatta, and the people flocked thither as they do to a bull-fight in Madrid. Fine races were held; it is a delicious amusement. What an excitement there was among us for days beforehand!"

He was quite elated at the recollection of those pleasant hours of health and strength, when neither love nor any domestic cares disturbed his merry life as a rich young athlete. Then seeing Cecilia's attention, he gave minute descriptions of little incidents in his athletic career. He told her of the races he won, those that he lost, and all the particulars relating to them. He recounted his experiences before and after the events, the kind of diet which he had to adopt to gain strength and to lose fat; he described the costume that he wore, even to the shape of the boots, and he dilated on the cries of the crowd on the banks of the river.

"There were none there stronger than you," she said, her eyes eloquent with admiration.

"Oh, yes, there were none bigger than I, but there were some stronger," he modestly replied.

The shyness of both had now vanished, and the old, pleasant sense of familiarity had reasserted itself. As he lay upon the bed, with his arms stretched out on the counterpane, he said that when he was quite himself again he would go to Tejada, for he would have to change his mode of life to avoid another illness; he thought of going in seriously for sport, he would set up a gymnasium near the house—in short, he made up his mind to be a different man altogether. Cecilia applauded his plans, and promised to accompany him sometimes. She liked Tejada much better than Sarrio; she was born for a country life, but her brother-in-law derided these remarks.

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"You don't know what it is going shooting down there. I daresay I should have to carry you in my arms as I did Ventura."

"No fear; I am stronger than I look."

When the girl at last was leaving the room Gonzalo said timidly:

"Couldn't you read to me a little?"

Cecilia had thought of the idea herself, but as the young man had complained of his wife not doing so, she thought it would put Ventura in a bad position if she offered to do so.

"What would you like me to read?"

"Anything, as long as it is not one of those horrible novels that my wife is so fond of."

"All right, I will read you 'The Christian Year.'"

"Oh, come!" he exclaimed, laughing.

So Cecilia then took from the shelf a volume of poems and began to read, seated near the foot of the bed. In a quarter of an hour Gonzalo fell into a delicious sleep as tranquil as a child. The girl stopped reading and looked at him attentively, or rather fixed her loving eyes on him for a long time.

Then, thinking she heard steps in the passage, and not wishing to be found in that attitude, she jumped up quickly from her chair and left the room on tiptoe. When Gonzalo was convalescent he carried out his wish of going to Tejada, and all the family accompanied him with the exception of Don Rosendo. It was the month of October, and instead of the yellow foliage of other estates, Don Rosendo's place, full of coniferas, presented a gloomy appearance not at all pleasing to the eye. The young man carried out his programme of a hygienic life. He rose early, took his gun, called his dogs, and struck across the country, returning most days with a few par-



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tridges in his bag, and as hungry as a cannibal. When his expeditions were shorter Cecilia accompanied him, according to her promise. Although on these occasions few partridges were shot, Gonzalo enjoyed the society of such a sympathetic, agreeable companion. The girl would never confess to being tired, but he always guessed it by her faltering step, and made her sit down until she was rested, when the time passed quickly in joking and talking.

But she had to struggle between her delight in these expeditions and the promises she had made her sister to work at the *layette* for the child.

When the time had come to think about it, Ventura was about to order it from Madrid, but Cecilia said to her:

"If I have the patterns I will undertake to make the things as well as if they came from the city."

Ventura demurred a little at first, but seeing that her sister was set upon the task, she soon gave in, and Cecilia commenced the work with such enthusiasm that she hardly gave herself time to eat and sleep.

Sometimes, when her brother-in-law wanted her to go out, she would say:

"No, you must let me work to-day; I have hardly done anything the last three days."

And when he insisted and made light of her labors, she gave in, saying:

"Very well, it will be all the worse for you when you find that the child has nothing to wear when it arrives."

"Don't trouble about that, dear," he returned, laughing. "I have sufficient shirts for him and myself too, particularly if he is likely to have a predilection for low collars."

By the end of the month the open air and sun had

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made Cecilia very much stronger, and Gonzalo declared that she looked like a boy, a sailor boy, so sunburnt was her face.

In the meanwhile Ventura led her sultana-like life, which was now more excusable. She hardly ever left the house. The minute care of her appearance took up a great deal of her time, and the rest of it was spent in the perusal of light novels. She grew more beautiful every day, and the incessant care of her person contributed not a little to increase her charms. She was like an artist in the indefatigable manner she touched and retouched her work in the way of attending to her hair, her skin, her teeth, and her hands. Marriage had added to her beauty by giving an additional fulness and womanliness to her figure, and changing her springtide prettiness into a more developed loveliness. Even her state of health was no drawback to her beauty, for it only seemed to give a greater dignity to her appearance. Then the wonderful taste, or better said, art, with which she knew how to adapt the color and form of her dress to her figure brought out all the charms of her lovely person.

And so the whole house was at Ventura's feet. All the human figures on those Chinese towers were swayed by her will, as if she were some feared and adored goddess. Even Doña Paula, who had been somewhat cool to her during the first months of her married life, succumbed to the sway. Ventura did not abuse her power as long as everything went as she wished, and she took care that it always did. So nobody but herself knew when they would return to Sarrio; the cook never arranged a meal without consulting her; the coachman came up every day to ask her at what time the carriage was wanted, and the gardener never moved a plant with-

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out her sanction. On the other hand, she did not concern herself at all about her husband's mode of amusement. Only once, when seeing him about to go out with Cecilia, she said with a smile before her sister and a few other people:

"You and Cecilia are becoming very friendly. I shall begin to be jealous."

But even as she said those words she gave the young man one of her dominating looks, which showed that she knew the strength of her power. Gonzalo could not break his chain, although he had considerably lengthened it, and he always returned to her feet quiet and submissive, like a comet that passes through space in its whirling course, and then, when at an immeasurable distance from the sun, it quietly turns itself towards it.

Gonzalo returned that look with one of absolute submission, but Cecilia turned slightly pale, and smiled to hide her confusion.

"Come, be off. I don't want to spoil your pleasure; but," she added, "if you do take advantage of me the worse for you, because revenge would be mine."

The joke was not a pretty one, considering the former relations that had existed between Cecilia and Gonzalo; but Venturita was not the woman to spare them on that account. The first days of December saw them all back in Sarrio, and a month later Ventura gave birth to a beautiful baby-girl, pink and white like herself. Gonzalo was so much in love with his wife that he hailed it with pleasure, but not with that rapture and delight with which some men greet their first-born. His interest was chiefly centred in the mother, with whom everything went well. He was constantly in and out of her room, he felt her pulse and pestered Don Rufo with

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questions. The doctor considered that Ventura might easily nurse her child, who was strong and well-formed. In consideration of the possibility of finding it exhausting, the girl had at first vaguely and then definitely expressed her objection to the course, so Gonzalo soon concurred in this decision, and, moreover, considered it quite reasonable. Doña Paula, on the other hand, was very indignant, but she did not dare to express her disapproval to Ventura's face.

Cecilia meanwhile devoted such care and attention to the baby that she soon had entire charge of it.

She had the nurse's bed and the child's *bassinette* brought into her own room, as it was supposed to make Ventura ill to have her nights disturbed, whilst it did not hurt her to have her sleep broken. And, in truth, she was the first to jump up when the child cried, and take it to the nurse; and if that did not quiet it, she walked for hours up and down the room with it in her arms, until she succeeded in putting it to sleep.

So the young married couple had their nights as utterly undisturbed as hitherto. When the baby was brought to its mother in the morning, Cecilia had already bathed it in warm water and dressed it in clean clothes. Ventura played with it a little, and when the time came for her retirement into her dressing-room she gave it back to her sister.

In like manner, although with a certain timidity, due to her desire not to offend her sister, and to show the difference in their dispositions, Cecilia undertook the care of Gonzalo's clothes and the order of his sitting-room; and her brother-in-law finally constantly gave her the keys of his wardrobe, saying:

"Cecilia, I am going to dress."

Then the girl would run to his room and return in

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a few moments, saying: "Your things are all ready." Whereupon Gonzalo would find his clothes laid out on the bed, his shirt with the studs put in, and his boots ready cleaned by the table.

"Cecilia, the fur has come a little undone on my coat." When he put it on again it was mended. And she who cared very little about her own dress was very particular about her brother-in-law being spick and span, and she would not for anything allow him to have soiled boots or a dirty collar. She delighted in going to the window and peeping at him through the curtain as he sallied forth to the café in a fine new suit, and with a cigar in his mouth; and she stood staring after him till he turned the corner, and watched till the smoke from his cigar had vanished.

One day, feeling angry with himself at spending so much money, Gonzalo gave Cecilia the key of his cash-box, saying:

"Look here, take care of this key; neither Ventura nor I are good managers. When we want money you can put it down in this note-book, and then let us know at the end of the month what we have spent. Perhaps we shall keep a little order like that."

Being thus provided with a steward, the married couple found their affairs improve. When any bill came in Gonzalo said to the servant with a smile:

"Take it to the manager."

Whereupon the servant also smiled, and took it to Cecilia.

This intimacy, this close companionship in almost all the acts of daily life, engendered utter confidence between the two, particularly on Gonzalo's side. Nothing happened to him in the street or in the café but he came and told Cecilia, who was never tired of listen-

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ing; his wife, on the other hand, never wanted to hear about his sport, his vexations, or his friends' affairs, for very little interested her beyond the fashions, balls, evening parties, and the marriages of the *élite* of Spain.

Her curiosity was mostly exercised in all concerning the king and queen and royal family.

She read with avidity the accounts of the gatherings at the palace; she was up in the court etiquette as much as any gentleman-in-waiting; she knew how the royal hand should be kissed; when it was necessary to speak in the presence of royalty, and how one ought to withdraw; and she was versed in the name and biography of every member of the royal family and every member of the court. The novels she read, and the conversation of the quondam lady-in-waiting of the queen who had come to take the baths in Sarrio, filled her mind with silly ambitions, and imbued her with a strong desire to live in the brilliant atmosphere of the court.

The majesty of royalty moved and inspired her, who had ever been incapable of submission, with humility, and the brilliant life at court suggested to her all the enchantment of a pleasant dream. When she went to Madrid her position as a mere rich provincial had only admitted her to the enjoyment of the theatres, drives in the Castellana, visits to the shops, and walks in the streets; but the court with all its gayeties and delights was still as far removed as if she had remained in Sarrio. Nevertheless, she was quite certain, and not without reason, that she could have been a star in those exalted spheres; that her beauty, her vivacity, and her charming ways would have brought her into note in the most distinguished society. Sometimes, when driving in a landau with her husband, she had seen the eyes of the Duke of S—— fixed upon her in flattering admira-

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tion, and she received the same notice from the Marquis of O——, and also from several eminent political people.

On one occasion she heard the Duchess of Medinaceli say to her companion as she drove past:

“Is that pretty girl just married?”

A poetic vision had remained to her of those three months in Madrid, a confused recollection of its pleasures, and a distinct desire to emulate the fashions of the smart ladies of the court with the poor means at her disposal in the little town of Sarrio. So on her return, whenever she went out, which was very seldom, she did so in a carriage, especially if it were to the theatre. It excited some surprise and no little grumbling in the town when the carriage was first seen waiting for her at the end of the performance.

The dresses in which she appeared in public were always fantastic, and utterly different to those worn by the other ladies of the place. They generally went about their homes with their old clothes “done up somehow,” as they expressed it. But Ventura created a revolution in this direction; she attired herself in the morning in new and pretty garments. She was never seen, even in the retirement of her boudoir, without being well turned out; and her silk morning-gown, her hair-nets—things hitherto unknown in Sarrio—and her velvet slippers were the admiration of the town.

Many ladies called upon her for the sole purpose of seeing her beautiful things.

When Gonzalo saw her absorbed in the perusal of society papers, and heard her describe some court ball as if she had been present, he would exclaim, laughing:

“Do you know how this mania of yours would be defined by the medical faculty? ‘Grandeur mad.’”

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This offended her, because, like all mocking creatures, she was deeply wounded by ridicule levelled at herself.

The young man sometimes laughed with his sister-in-law at his wife's eccentricities, and at other times he became quite angry with her conduct, which he termed stupid and shallow; but Cecilia tried to appease him by reminding him of the youth and the impressibleness of Ventura.

"You will see," she said; "in a few months' time she will have given up all such nonsense."

Cecilia was his safety-valve, the confidante of all his matrimonial troubles, and he never failed to receive from her some useful advice or some consoling words that calmed his splenetic outbursts. He became so accustomed to these confidences that, if his sister-in-law were not at home after any difference he had with Ventura, he would put on his hat and run in search of her to the Promenade, to church, or wherever she might be.

The many hours that they spent together also favored these confidences. Ventura did not like going out, and as Don Rufo ordered the child fresh air, Cecilia undertook to accompany the nurse, and Gonzalo also joined the walks. The nurse with the baby went first, and the young man followed with Cecilia. It was during these long walks that he confided to her all his secrets, all his hopes and fears and joys. Sometimes when hearing her speak with so much perspicacity on serious matters, he exclaimed, with a want of gallantry to his wife:

"What a pity Ventura has not your clever, sensible disposition!"

She, on the other hand, was as impenetrable to him as to everybody else. Whether it was because she had

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no secrets to tell, or whether it was due to her excessively reserved disposition, the fact remained that the eldest daughter of Belinchon carefully avoided talking of herself. Neither her joys nor her troubles were confided to anybody, and only a very sharp observer could have detected the emotions that moved her; and Gonzalo, in the simple egoism of a strong and healthy man incapable of much perspicacity, simply looked upon his sister-in-law as a passive, rational, cold being, admirable for giving advice and managing others, but incapable of feeling those rages, those joys, those insensate passions that assail weak natures like his own.

Nevertheless, he tried sometimes, in a joking way, to win her confidence. He knew that three or four young men in the town aspired to her hand, for he had come upon one or two walking up and down in front of the house, and in the theatre he had noticed them turning their opera-glasses in her direction; and although Gonzalo was somewhat disgusted at seeing that the attention was due more to the attraction of her money than to love, he tried to flatter her by alluding to her admirers.

She received the remarks in stony silence, with an absent sort of smile to conceal her thoughts, until she found herself obliged to turn the conversation.

But on one occasion Gonzalo treated the subject with more seriousness and greater pertinacity. A friend of his boyhood, an engineer, had spoken to him of Cecilia, and begged him to do his best to interest her on his behalf. The young man was very much pleased with the frank, open way in which his friend spoke on the matter.

"Gonzalo," he said, "I am now at an age and in a position to marry. I did not care about doing so either in Madrid or in Seville, because I mistrust women I

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have not known for some time. Men ought to marry in their own neighborhood girls they have seen grow up round about them. I determined to marry one of the girls here, and I have set my heart upon your sister-in-law. I will now confide to you my ideas about her. Cecilia is neither pretty nor ugly; she is a passable woman, and I have always thought that such a one makes the best wife. In the four or five times I have met her at the Saldanas I found her very friendly, reasonable, frank, and modest. Her girl friends all speak well of her, which fact men don't take sufficiently into account when they are thinking of marriage, for girls are implacable, and bear eternal grudges against each other. Besides, your sister-in-law will have a nice fortune shortly. I don't see why I should not mention it, because it is another fact which should be borne in mind. I don't see why men should systematically marry poor women. Marriage increases a man's expenses; children cause a considerable outlay; and all these things have to be taken into account. But I have no need to marry for fortune. I have rather a lucrative profession, and my parents will leave me some money. Will you ask her if she has found me to her taste the few times I have talked with her, and if she will allow me to call on her?"

Gonzalo promised to use his influence on his behalf, whilst he could not help prophesying success to his friend's designs, for he was conscious of the influence he exercised over his sister-in-law, and she had never hitherto neglected any of his wishes.

"If I am not able to bring it about, nobody can," he added in a burst of spontaneous confidence and pride. So that same evening, when Cecilia came to light his lamp in his study, he said to her with a smile:

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"Are you busy now, Cecilia? No. Then sit down a minute, I have something to say to you."

The girl looked at him with her large, luminous, soft eyes full of surprise. Gonzalo made her take a seat.

"Have you a lover?" he asked brusquely.

"What a question!" she exclaimed, with a face smiling and unabashed.

"I am not speaking of a formal lover. If you had one I should have been told. I only want to know whether, among the young men who pay attention to you, any one has succeeded in finding favor with you."

"Why do you want to know?"

"Answer."

Cecilia made a negative gesture.

"Then I am going to take the liberty of speaking to you on behalf of one who has appealed to me. I mean my friend, Paco Flores, whom you know. He has begged me to intercede for him, and to ask you if you have found him objectionable the few times he has talked with you."

"Objectionable?" she asked in surprise. "Why? I do not dislike anybody as long as they behave well."

"Then he asked me if you would consent to his calling here."

"That is another matter," she returned, suddenly becoming serious. "I cannot hinder his calling here, but if my consent thereto implies my liking his visits, I am not disposed to give it."

"It is not a question of your accepting him as a bridegroom," Gonzalo quickly said; "he only wants you to give him a little time, and then if you consider him worthy of your hand you can take him, and if not, you can refuse him."

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"Well, it is refused now, and without need of any further talk," returned the girl with firmness.

"That is very sudden," said Gonzalo, smiling to conceal the vexation that her brusque refusal caused him.

"It seems to me that in these matters the sincerer we are, the better it is for all parties. Why should this young man trouble himself to visit here for some time only to receive the answer that I can give him to-day?"

"Well, well, let us proceed calmly. If Paco is not antipathetic to you, as you say, you cannot be sure that you may not fall in love with him by the end of six or eight months or a year."

"I am incapable of falling in love," she said, with a bitter smile that was incomprehensible to her brother-in-law.

"Love comes when least expected," Gonzalo observed sententiously. "We may go years and years without it, and then one day, paf! the heart gives a bound, because we have met our other half."

These words, so simple and yet so cruel, stirred the gall-like bitterness of her heart. With her eyes fixed on one of the arms of the chair in which she was seated, she said in rapid, hard tones:

"Well, I am certain my heart will never go off, paf! one day."

"Why are you so certain, Cecilia? Women, more than men, are made for the delights of love and for family life."

Cecilia listened to him in silence; her face was severe, and her eyes were fixed on space.

The words of her brother-in-law sent a note of desolation through her heart. Yes, it was true, unfortunately it was all true! When he had finished the apology for love, he made one for his friend Paco Flores: such a nice

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young fellow, too; so courteous, the son of a good family, with a brilliant career, etc., etc.

But Cecilia was firm in refusing her consent to his coming to the house. Then Gonzalo, somewhat vexed at her obstinacy, and wounded in his self-love for having boasted of his influence with his sister-in-law, uttered some rather cruel remarks.

"Perhaps he is not grand enough for you! Paco is not rich, but he can certainly aspire to your hand. There is no better fellow in Sarrio; nobody can say that the marriage would be an unequal one. Oh, perhaps you expect a prince of the blood! But take care lest you make a great mistake, for woman's youth soon passes, and many chances are lost like this."

The girl listened to her brother-in-law's oration till it was over without moving a muscle. When it was finished, she quietly rose from her seat, and quickly left the room. On crossing the passage on the way to her room two large tears rolled down her cheeks.

Interesting Incidents

CHAPTER XIV

GALLICISMS IN "THE LIGHT OF SARRIO," AND OTHER
INTERESTING INCIDENTS—FIRST CASUALTIES IN THE
BATTLE OF THOUGHT.

AFTER his glorious duel the gallant Belinchon wore the laurels of his well-earned fame with becoming modesty. There are chroniclers who are not of this opinion, but then their dissent is grounded upon the discovery of certain annoyances to which the worthy gentleman subjected some of the townsfolk, whilst ignoring the fact that such annoyances did not take place simultaneously with the reported duel, but some time later.

Chronology is always an important element of history, and in this particular instance it gives a satisfactory explanation of the acts of our hero. During the first excitement of the event he was accorded the marks of admiration indisputably due to him; even his enemies regarded him with respect mingled with admiration when they saw him pass. Then Don Rosendo, instead of abusing his recognized superiority, as any other man of less force of character and modesty would have done, preserved his same stately, quiet demeanor, and walked along the streets as gravely and unpretentiously as hitherto—a noble example of magnanimity, which, however, instead of redounding to his credit, only exposed him to attacks.

The Cabin soon began to make light of the affair, and malignant stress was laid upon the exaggerated accounts of the backward jumps given by the founder

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of "The Light of Sarrio" in the duel. These jokes, of which it can well be supposed Gabino Maza was the originator, did not stop in the precincts of the Club, for they soon spread through the whole place, so that at the end of a few days the majority of the townsfolk smiled ironically when the duel of honor was mentioned.

Don Rosendo became conscious of this state of things, not only by his ears, but also by his eyes, for he noticed that the respectful, courteous glances of his neighbors were gradually exchanged for a rude sort of behavior, shown in turning their heads away when he approached, or in ill-suppressed laughter when they passed him in a narrow street.

What was he to do in such a case? Indisputably it was time to lay aside modesty and make rude fellows feel the dignity of his noble art of self-defence.

The first sign he gave of the scorn and contempt in which he held his enemies was to spit upon the ground when any of the party passed him, to demonstrate his loathing for them. As soon as the reason of this act dawned upon the faction, the more timid, fearing that lightning might follow the rain, took care to avoid him; the braver ones, however, passed him without heeding the scornful act, but they dared not look him in the face. At the end of some time several took it calmly as a joke, and said to one another with a laugh:

"I say, I have just met Don Rosendo."

"Well, did he spit at you?"

"I should think he did!"

Thus the Cabin party made fun of our great patriot, and rude practical jokes were played on him.

In one of these it was arranged that all the members of the Cabin should pass by him in single file, at a certain distance from each other, which was such a strain on

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Don Rosendo's power or desire to spit, that his throat became quite sore and unequal to the continual effort. But Gabino Maza, who took the whole matter quite seriously, said he would see if that ox (the word is strong, but it is textual) would dare spit when he passed. And, in fact, Don Rosendo had always abstained from doing it at him, as he thought that a certain amount of consideration was due to the head of the opposite party.

But one evening, when he was carrying his head rather high, being somewhat excited after reading the account of a certain duel between two Yankees, it suddenly occurred to him to spit, in a provocative way, as he came across Gabino Maza, close to the Café de la Marina. Whereupon Gabino became white with rage, and seizing him by the wrist, he said, in a tone of fury:

"Listen to me, you great fool, you shan't spit at me like that; no, not if you were in the last stage of phthisis, do you hear?"

As a conventional man, well versed in *affaires d'honneur*, Don Rosendo said nothing at the moment, but on the following day he did not leave the house, as he waited for Maza's challenge, which, happily for him, did not come.

In spite of everything Don Rosendo's duelling energy excited emulation in the town. Thanks to our hero there arose a great taste for the exercise of arms, and many of the most distinguished townsfolk went in enthusiastically for the art of fencing.

Not only the staff of "The Light" and the members of the Club practised the science of Monsieur Lemaire, but the members of the Cabin, recognizing the importance of the art, established a *salle d'armes* in a warehouse near by, and put at its head a retired cavalry officer who had wielded the foil in Madrid. The im-



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mediate consequence of this step was, that all the disputes that now arose between the Club and the Cabin were formally settled with all the ceremonious etiquette of the code of honor.

Hardly a week went by without the town being excited at the going and coming of seconds, meetings held in corners of cafés, whilst the proceedings were published in "The Light" and in the Lancian papers. But out of twenty disputes nineteen would end in an *amende honorable*, drawn up and signed by the seconds.

So that, although these *affaires d'honneur* were conducted in accordance with the usual procedure, they involved nothing more serious than the blow or insult which gave rise to the quarrel.

On rare occasions, when a great deal of feeling was excited, a meeting was arranged. Delaunay called out Don Rufo for a paragraph in "The Future" in which it was stated that the doctors did not go the round of the hospital at the prescribed hours, and some sword strokes were interchanged. The printer Folgueras also had an encounter with Marin's son-in-law for having omitted to bow to him.

In both cases nothing worse than a few sword cuts transpired.

The most noteworthy affair was that between Don Rudesindo and Don Pedro Miranda, who, after vacillating for some time, finally joined the Cabin party.

The origin of the quarrel was the slaughter-house problem, the occasion the following: Don Pedro was heard one day to say that Don Rudesindo only remained on Belinchon's side because he did not want the slaughter-house built on the Plaza de las Meanas, as it would affect his house property there.

The cider manufacturer, hearing of this remark, spoke

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insultingly of Don Pedro at the Club, and appeared exceedingly angry at the imputation, although, in fact, he was not so much so as he pretended to be.

Alvaro Peña, who was never so happy as when he had a duel on hand, hastened to say in a loud voice, with his characteristic arrogance:

"Look out, Don Rudesindo, Miranda must give you satisfaction. Would you like to leave it to me to settle?"

The good manufacturer felt as if he would willingly have eaten the words he had let drop, but Peña was such an impetuous fellow. Why the devil had he said he would like to kick Don Pedro downstairs, when, in truth, he had just met him as he was leaving home, and had passed him without uttering a word! But more than twenty people were now present, and he was in the wretched position of being obliged to reply to the officer in the least aggressive tone he could command:

"Very well, if you think it is worth the trouble."

"But it is not a case of worth. Do you think you are only on our side to be exposed to such low remarks? Why, they are an insult to you. I say, Don Feliciano, a word with you."

Don Feliciano and he then conferred together in a corner for a few short minutes, and then sallied forth into the street. Don Rudesindo remained apparently calm, but inwardly much incensed against Peña, against the Club, against himself, and against the mother who bore him. What necessity was there for him to embroil himself, a married man with children, whose whole life had been spent in working like a slave to amass a little capital? And now that he had got it—for this fellow's humbug—it was a fine thing! And the manufacturer could hardly swallow the sips of cognac with which he was regaling himself.

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The affair was quickly arranged. Don Pedro Miranda was quite taken aback at the visit of Peña and Don Feliciano. He said that he had no recollection—that he had no spite whatsoever against Don Rudesindo, on the contrary. But Peña interrupted him by saying:

“Very well, Don Pedro, we can’t listen to all that. Just name two friends, who will arrange with us.”

The poor proprietor suggested Gabino Maza and Delaunay, and as one of these was a choleric, fiery man, and the other a bad-hearted fellow, no pacification was possible. All explanations were refused. The duel was arranged to take place in the early morning, and swords were the weapons to be used.

When Don Rudesindo heard it, he cursed the day he saw the light, and his adversary threw himself onto a sofa and asked for a cup of *tilleul*. However, there was nothing to be done but to obey the call of honor, and we dare not say whether they were impelled thereto by their own free will or by extraneous circumstances.

At six in the morning Peña and Don Feliciano on one side, and Maza and Delaunay on the other, dragged them from their homes to the old cemetery. What lugubrious fancies passed through Don Pedro Miranda’s head as he journeyed thither! They were only comparable to those that assailed Don Rudesindo on the same journey. Before arriving, Peña said to him:

“I am quite sure, Don Rudesindo, that you will settle him, and I feel primed with courage. Don’t push yourself, but you have a difficult part to play, very difficult!”

The manufacturer would have sacrificed all his property at that moment to have found it not only difficult but impossible.

“Don Pedro is not firm on his legs; besides, he is short in the arm. But, as you know, in fighting there is noth-

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ing certain, and it is always the unexpected that happens. If you have any last requests to make, make them before we arrive."

Don Rudesindo shuddered. He remained silent for some time as he walked along, and finally, drawing some papers from his pocket, he gave them to his friend, saying in a stifled voice:

"If I perish give these to Señor Benito."

Two tears then gathered in his eyes.

"Do you mean Señor Benito the Rat?" asked Peña.

Don Rudesindo did not hear him. He had walked quickly on to hide his emotion. Why the name of his clerk should upset him so much at that moment we cannot explain. Perhaps in the great crises of life we are suddenly apprised of the existence of strong, deep feelings hitherto unsuspected.

The old cemetery, put in order a short time later, was then overrun with grass and briars.

The wooden crosses had rotted away, and the only evidence of its being the home of the dead lay in the two skulls encrusted in the wall on either side of the gate.

These skulls were certainly not conducive to raising Don Rudesindo's spirits. We do not know about Don Pedro, but we suspect that the effect was no more pleasant upon him.

Some time was spent in finding a convenient spot, as the nettles and briars rendered it impossible for the combatants to take their places.

Whilst Peña and the seconds of the other side busied themselves about this most solemn task, good Don Feliciano Gomez committed the indiscretion (God bless him for it!) of going up to Don Pedro Miranda, who, with his white face, frightened eyes, and his inside upset by

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the fabulous amount of *tillou* he had imbibed that night, was leaning against the wall, waiting for the seconds to finish their task, and looking like a criminal condemned to death.

"Hello, Don Pedro! Cold, eh? Caramba! what a morning! Look here; fancy a man leaving his bed for this! Goodness gracious! (*Silence, interrupted by a few groans from the unhappy Miranda.*) I would have given my little finger, my little finger, not to have had to assist at such an atrocity! But they say it was a favor that cannot be refused. Well, I suppose it cannot when it is a matter of a serious offence. But what is the serious offence in this case? Come, let us see, let us hear. What is it? Would to God! would to God! (*Fresh silence and fresh groans from Don Pedro, who finished by dropping his head resignedly upon his breast as if he were putting it upon the block.*) How much better it would be to be in bed taking chocolate, eh, my boy?" continued Don Feliciano, putting his hand upon his shoulder with great familiarity. To this remark Miranda uttered an almost inaudible guttural sound of assent.

"Yes, I should think so," said the merchant. "For whatever they say, I cannot believe that you want to kill Don Rudesindo, a neighbor who has been your friend up to a little while ago, who has grown up with you and went to school with you."

"I do not want—at all," murmured Don Pedro, as if his head were still upon the block.

"That's right!" exclaimed Don Feliciano, giving him a hearty slap on the shoulder. "I said so, and Don Rudesindo feels the same. Then who wants to kill whom? Come, let us hear." And he cast his eyes around, seeking for an answer to his question.

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Pefia, Maza, and Delaunay were at some distance, hidden among the cypresses. Don Rudesindo, also leaning against the wall, was about fifty paces off.

Then the merchant, filled by a sudden and heavenly inspiration, made a sign for him to approach.

Don Rudesindo came slowly towards him with a timid, hesitating step.

"Tell me, dear fellow, have you any desire to kill Don Rudesindo?" asked the merchant of Miranda.

"None whatever," he murmured.

"Have you any wish to wound him?"

"Hardly. I have always esteemed Don Rudesindo," stammered the man of property.

"Eh? What? What do you say?" cried Don Feliciano in a tone of triumph. "That you have always esteemed Don Rudesindo? Eh, my dear fellow? You said so?"

"Yes, señor."

"Tell me, Don Rudesindo" (taking a few steps towards the cider manufacturer), "do you wish to kill Don Pedro, a neighbor who has hitherto been your friend, who has grown up with you, and who went with you to Don Martia's school?"

"I? Why should I?" said the merchant, opening his eyes wide in distress.

"Would you wish to wound him?"

"No, nor do him the least harm. I have always considered him a real friend."

"How is this, eh? A real friend, eh? Then, in my humble opinion, I think you ought both to embrace each other."

Hardly had Don Feliciano uttered these words than Miranda and Don Rudesindo, by a simultaneous impulse, rushed into each other's arms, and embraced with

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such effusion that the bones in their bodies were all but broken.

Don Feliciano at the same time bared his bald, retreating forehead, and waving his hat wildly for some minutes, he shouted:

“Hurrah!”

I do not know to whom this hurrah was addressed if not to the astute spirit to whom he owed his brilliant idea.

At that moment the seconds approached and gazed with surprise at what was going on.

They tried to look pleased at the turn the affair had taken, and soon went their different ways. But that evening at the Club Peña sharply reprimanded Don Feliciano for his conduct, going so far as to say that he had put him in a ridiculous position, and that, did he not look upon him as a friend of long standing and older than himself, he would ask satisfaction.

“Satisfaction?” exclaimed the optimistic Don Feliciano. “What next will you ask, you exacting creature?”

“Would you refuse to fight me?” asked the officer in a ringing voice.

“What should we fight about?”

“What you like.”

“I, for dancing a fandango or a bolero, my dear fellow,” he returned, as he proceeded to dance up and down the room, and snap his fingers until his hat fell off and exposed his bald head to view.

The members of the Club rolled on the sofas with laughter, and Peña, after giving vent to some contemptuous remarks, retired from the scene in vexation and disgust.

The members of the Cabin being constantly attacked

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in the articles of "The Light," finally decided to start another paper, in which they could avenge the injustices to which they had been exposed.

This entailed an enormous sacrifice, because very few among them were rich. The only one that could be called so was Don Pedro Miranda, and he would rather have a tooth drawn than loosen his purse-strings.

By dint of meetings, touting, asking help from different quarters, and making collections at the Cabin, they ended by getting the requisite sum of money for setting up a printing-press, as Folgueras was not willing to print the publication, nor did they wish to humiliate themselves by asking such a favor. When the printing apparatus, modest as it was, was all in order, the occasion was celebrated by the indispensable banquet, at which it was decided to name the new organ "The Youth of Sarrio," and all its supporters glowed with enthusiasm for its prosperity and with desire for the destruction of its vile enemies.

The appearance of the first number, bearing a vignette representing a youth surrounded with rows of books for his perusal and delectation, caused a great sensation in the town, and it deserved it. The members of the Cabin, who had been powerless to resent the insults heaped upon them by "The Light" for many months, now avenged themselves with interest. Santo Cristo de Rodillero, what a stream of insults and attacks! From the beginning to the end it was full of caustic attacks on the members of the Club. They did not openly call one a rogue, another a villain, another a brute, another a humbug, and so forth, but they spoke of them under names by which no one could fail to recognize them. Belinchon was called "Don Quixote," and Don Rudesindo "Sancho," Sinforoso the "Marquis of Kicks,"

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and Peña "Captain Cholerick," etc. And shielded thus, they attacked them in a most merciless fashion, and did not leave them a leg to stand on.

Sticks were used at night on the Rua Nueva. Folgueras, who had also his share of insults in "The Youth of Sarrio," met Gabino Maza and levelled a blow at his head, which Maza returned with interest, and Folgueras renewed the attack, for a compositor came to his assistance, and his opponent was seconded by his son-in-law, which made the brawl look quite alarming.

"The Youth of Sarrio" was published every Sunday. Periquito Miranda was glad of an outlet for his poetic vein, as his father's quarrel with the Club had arrested the demand for his effusions in that quarter; but it now overflowed in numberless sonnets, odes, acrostics, and other metrical combinations which bore witness to his platonic love for the wife of the manager of the steel factory, a great, elephantine, stout Frenchwoman who could easily have put him in her pocket. But we know that Periquito had a predilection for ponderous, portly specimens of womankind. He found that the form of *dreams* was his best mode of expressing the feelings which assailed and tormented his soul. The platonic youth dreamed in verse that he was in a lovely grotto, where a nymph with waving arms invited him to repose upon a couch of roses and green grasses. Another time he was on the summit of a very high mountain, when on the billowy clouds in the distant horizon a form of a woman (the wife of the manager) took shape; the clouds approached, the woman was white as driven snow, glorious and splendid as a magnolia flower, and the beautiful apparition finally came towards him and bore him off to azure space, encircled in her arms. Another time he was sailing in a little ship on the ocean waves. The

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ship foundered, and he descended to the briny depths to be welcomed by a fair and most beautiful nymph (always the wife of the manager), who took him by the hand, led him to a magnificent crystal palace, seated him at her side on a marble throne, and invited him to the nuptial ceremony to the strains of sweet music, after which she escorted him to an apartment which was a marvel of decoration.

These dreams of bliss, put into facile verse yet adorned with a certain poetic gravity, caused some anxiety among the paterfamilias. Periquito daily ate more and grew thinner.

"The Light" of the following Thursday, after loading the chief members of the Cabin with insults, attacked the poet under the malicious, satirical pseudonym of Pericles.

A fierce and incessant warfare thus arose between "The Light" and "The Youth of Sarrio," and the columns of both papers were filled with mutual insults and recriminations.

It seldom happened that a number of either of the publications appeared without giving rise to some blows or brawl, if not to a formal duel. Nevertheless, they became more chary in this respect. It was an easy matter to be a second for any contending parties, but to use a sword or pistol on one's own behalf was another matter. The spirit of controversy inflamed the minds of the townsfolk, many people who had remained indifferent in the disputes between the Club and the Cabin ended by joining one side or the other, in some cases because they took up the cudgels on behalf of their relations, and in other cases merely because the dispute aroused a kindred feeling in their bellicose temperaments.

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The place was soon divided into two parties. The side which boasted of Don Rosendo as its worthy chief was the most numerous, and it consisted of almost all the rich merchants of Sarrio. That of the Cabin was smaller, numbering the landowners and the timorous religious people who had been scandalized by "The Light."

The dissension increased to such a degree that in a short time those that belonged to one side totally ignored those of the opposite party, although they had been good friends hitherto.

"The Light" and "The Youth of Sarrio" began to criticise each other's style and grammar, eagerly seizing upon any mistakes of syntax, and finding as much fault with the diction as with the verbs.

"This word is not Castilian," said "The Youth of Sarrio."

"The word *desilusionar*, which the pettifoggers of 'The Youth of Sarrio' say is not Castilian," returned "The Light," "we have seen used by the most eminent writers of Madrid, such as Ferez, Gonzalez, Martinez, etc. This time, as usual, the organ of the Cabin has overreached itself."

"The Youth" replied to this remark, "The Light" retorted; instances from the grammar, dictionary, and distinguished authors were quoted, and at last nobody knew what to think.

"The Youth of Sarrio" was condemned for using the preposition *de* after *debía* when referring to the Calle de Atras requiring to be repaired.

"A *DE de trop*, dear student."

"But when the verb is used conditionally," returned "The Youth," "the *de* is required. Have the editors of 'The Light' been to school, or not?"

"We have been to school," was the reply, "to greater

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purpose, as it seems, than all the fools of the Cabin, and we know that in the present case the verb *deber* is not used conditionally."

"Yes, it is." "No, it is not." And things went on as before, although sometimes they spoke of referring the questions to the Academy of Language. "Don Juan Tenoris," by Zorilla, was often quoted, and citations from "El Curioso Parlante" were brought to bear on the questions at issue.

This grammatical controversy drove people to the study of a science of which they had hitherto been ignorant. The effect was the same at both the Club and the Cabin, and two or three copies of the latest grammar of the Academy were constantly in request.

The most venomous of the linguistic attacks were those directed against Don Rosendo, whom it was considered expedient to crush in respect of his being the head and soul of his party. Belinchon had never studied grammar, except in his childhood, but like all superior spirits, if he did not know it he divined it. His opponents were constantly bringing to light a thousand anachronisms in his articles, but such was the confidence with which his powerful mind inspired us that we never credited these remarks, and only regarded them as pure calumnies. If there had been no grammar, Belinchon, with all his natural gifts, would have been capable of inventing one. Nobody was a greater master than he of the language of the press, bright but brilliant, full of phrases made sacred by the use of a hundred writers.

Thanks to his wonderful style, Don Rosendo could write an article on the liberty of culture with the same facility as he could pen an informal account of the fishing industry.

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His enemies said that he used gallicisms. And what if he did? The mere fact of a writer of such repute using them converted them into the purest Castilian.

This anxiety to show up the gallicisms of "The Light" was one of the manias of "The Youth of Sarrio," or "The Local Student," as it was always called by the other publication, anxious to show the withering contempt it had for it by not even giving it its proper name. By the use of a certain old dictionary in the possession of one of the members of the Club they were merciless in their attacks on the articles and the novelettes in "The Light." If Don Rosendo said in courteous language that for want of *conveniancias* he could not touch upon certain subjects, "The Youth" called him to book in a sarcastic style. Where did the clever Don Quixote (as they almost always called Belinchon) learn this use of the word *conveniencia*? It was certainly not in the famous history written by Cervantes. If he used the word *gubernamental* or *banal*, or the phrase *Tener lugar*, what bursts of derision from "The Youth of Sarrio"! what mockery! what scorn! This lasted until the Club got hold of another dictionary of gallicisms, and then both papers became so involved on the subject that they ended by ignoring purism, and returning to their free, happy, independent style.

Moreover, the controversy had become so heated that classic terms were insufficient for the conveyance of their insults.

In all the articles such terms as "venomous reptile," "despicable creatures," "obtuse brains," "wallowing in the mire," "ignoble and degraded beings" were adopted on one side as well as the other.

Tired of insulting each other, they proceeded to lead

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the attack into the family life, and modest wives and venerable fathers were soon not safe from the shafts. "The Youth of Sarrio" was the first to start in that quarter by publishing an Arab story called "The Eastern Slave," in which form an exact relation was given of the history of Doña Paula and her marriage with Don Rosendo (Mahomad Zegri), flavored with low-toned remarks and shameful insinuations. Belinchon felt inclined to call the staff out, but thinking it would only add fuel to the fire and look as if the cap fitted him, he decided to confine his revenge to the organ of the press.

Sinforoso, at his request, then wrote an Indian story, in which the life and shady doings of Maza's father figured, for he had been a slave-owner, and had made his fortune in trafficking in human flesh. Henceforth Eastern stories were freely told on both sides as instruments for laying bare the peccadilloes of either party.

The widest field for strife, and the richest in results for both the Club and the Cabin, was that of politics. The eyes of both parties turned in that direction, and no opportunities were lost for skirmishes and conquests. Until this division in the town, politics, as we know, had played but a small part in Sarrio. But from that time it became the constant subject, the indispensable element of all masculine conversation.

No one had hitherto thought of referring to Rojas Salcedo on the subject of the *alcalde's* re-election, because Don Roque was the friend of everybody, and had represented the district for eighteen years. Nevertheless, as the time of the municipal elections drew near, letters were sent from both parties on the matter.

It must be mentioned that the members of the Club wished at all cost to have Don Roque deposed from the municipal chair, because on more than one occasion, in

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the exercise of his duties, he had sided with the opposite party at the expense of his old friends.

"The Light" repudiated him on this account. The enmity increased. Don Roque in revenge abused his authority by sending Folgueras to prison, and the attacks of "The Light" proceeded with redoubled fury. Don Roque being now regarded as a tyrant of the Middle Ages, began to fear for his life, and went about night and day accompanied by the veteran Marcones.

It was said that his death was decreed at a secret meeting of the members of the Club, so the hair of the poor *alcalde* stood on end with terror if he espied any of "The Light" party in a lonely quarter, and he promptly turned his steps in an opposite direction.

Rojas Salcedo replied to the members of the Cabin that if Don Roque were elected councillor he would be re-elected *alcalde*. At the same time he secretly wrote to the members of the Club, charging them to do their best to prevent his being elected, and in this way he sided with both parties.

But the partisans of Belinchon triumphed all along the line by reason of their numbers, their riches, and their open-handedness. The struggle was finally concentrated on the matter of Don Roque. The members of the Cabin knew that if he were elected the battle would be won, because he would be *alcalde*, and the power of that office would outweigh any other influence in the corporation. The Club was also quite alive to the fact, so both sides fought with the fiercest zeal. At last the old *alcalde* was defeated at election by a small number of votes. Confused and cast down, with his eyes terribly inflamed and his face so livid that it was fearful to see, he finally retired home after spending the whole day at the Town Hall. A king robbed of his

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crown could not have felt the blow more keenly. He arrived at his house without an escort, like any ordinary being. He had seen Marcones in the corridor, and he was certain Marcones had seen him, but he had not ventured to ask him to accompany him home, as the old official was standing talking obsequiously to Don Rufo, his enemy, and pretended not to see his old chief pass by. It was not that Marcones turned to the rising sun, but, imbued with the principle of modern statesmanship, he understood that the public force ought always to be at the service of the reigning power.

And yet it was really more necessary for Don Roque to be escorted home than it had hitherto been. Besides suffering from a shock that went to his heart, he felt physically indisposed. These long hours of agony, suspense, receiving contradictory reports at every minute, on no nourishment but drops of gin since the morning, had worked a dreadful change in him. His legs shook and his sight failed. To reach his home he had to support himself several times against the wall. On his arrival at the door the old servant who opened it started back aghast, the face of her master looked as if his throat was being squeezed by pitiless, invisible hands. Although she was always able to interpret the confused, indistinguishable sounds that issued from his mouth, she could not understand a word he said on this occasion. Seeing him go straight to his room, she took him a glass and some water. But Don Roque in a fury dashed the glass to the ground, and roared like a person possessed with the devil. However, it was impossible to understand what those hollow, fearful, demoniacal sounds meant which rose to his mouth, and before issuing forth resounded four or five times in the enormous cavities of his throat. Trembling and alarmed, she ran



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to fetch a bottle of wine. Although somewhat appeased, he declined to take it, and he repeated with greater emphasis, but with no more clearness, the order that he had given. At last, by dint of sharpening her wits, the servant managed to understand that her master wanted some rum punch. Don Roque, seeing that she had understood him, became calm; he took off the enormous greatcoat in which he was enveloped, then his frock coat, tried to take off his boots; his noble municipal countenance assumed the color of Valdepenas wine, but he could not bring the undertaking to a satisfactory conclusion, so when the servant came with the punch she completed it for him.

Then he said he was going to bed, and the doors were to be well locked, and he was not to be disturbed on any pretext whatsoever. The servant did not understand a word of this discourse, but divining the purport, she withdrew.

Don Roque then threw himself on to his bed, drew the clothes up, and with his back against the pillows, he took the glass of punch and put it to his lips. On discovering that there was a deficiency in one of the ingredients, he uttered a guttural awful sound, and rising from the bed, he fetched the bottle of rum from his cupboard and put it on the little table by the bedside.

Then once more in bed, he gravely and solemnly proceeded, with the glass in one hand and the bottle in the other, to repair the servant's error. He took a sip of punch and then filled up the glass from the bottle, and the concoction thus strengthened was more befitting the state of agitation which possessed his mind, for under that apparent calm Don Roque's brain was wild with excitement. All the hours of the day passed before him in their sad and depressing course—the deceptions he

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had endured, the disappointed hopes, the heated discussions, and finally the desertion of Marcones.

And then the future. That was of the blackest description. Was he to resign the *alcalde's* mace that he had wielded with glory so many years, to turn into a nobody without an escort, a private person, not to have the run of the Town Hall, not to pass by any of the corporation officials, and not to be able to say: "Juan, go to Rabila well, and don't let the servants be cleaning their pails there"?

If he saw a stonebreaker in the road, was he not to have the power of telling him to strike harder or gentler, to raise the axe less or more?

His feet were intensely cold. He got up two or three times to put the clothes thicker over them, but his efforts were fruitless. The contents of the bottle finally passed to the glass, and from the glass to his stomach. A pleasant heat then pervaded his inside and gradually permeated through all his members. Don Roque then felt his tongue loosen, and he began to talk to himself very distinctly in his own opinion, but if any mortals had been in earshot they would have retreated in horror.

Sounds like all, call, mall seemed to figure most frequently in the monologue, from which a perspicacious philologue, taking into account the combination of the vowel *a* and the consonants *ll*, would have deduced the probability that the word expressed by the *alcalde* was *canalla* (*canaille*), and this would have been a more or less legitimate deduction.

At last he was silent. He felt a fiery heat in his throat, which passed to his head and face. His tongue declined to move. He experienced a sensation of physical increase of his whole being; his head especially

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seemed to grow; it grew in such a measureless way that it overpowered him.

At the same time the objects about him—the cupboard, bed, washstand, and the sticks standing in the corner—appeared to grow small. He seemed to hear in his head the noise of the machinery of a clock in motion, a wheel that went round swiftly, and a hammer that fell rhythmically with a metallic sound. The hammer ceased and the wheel went on.

He thought he heard strange noises in the street that petrified him with fear. Poor Don Roque did not know that his enemies were at that moment treating him to “rough music.” He thought of calling the servant, but feared that the sounds were imaginary, as they had been before. And, in fact, he was confirmed in this idea by hearing a deafening clang of bells, a discordant sound in which all seemed mingled, from the largest bell of Toledo to the smallest hand-bell.

How bewildering! how fatiguing! Fortunately it ceased with a final loud clang, but it was immediately succeeded by a whistle so long and so sharp that it seemed it must break his tympanum, and he instinctively raised his hands to his ears. On the cessation of the whistle he thought that the foot of the bed went up and the head went down, until his feet were above his head, which was a most agonizing sensation. He then gave a long sigh, and his feet returned to their normal level; but as the same proceeding was repeated several times, he had to give repeated long sighs to regain his normal position.

But that fantastic operation did not warm Don Roque’s feet. They were like two pieces of ice, whilst the rest of his body was burning hot. His head especially rose to a fearful temperature that increased every minute.

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When he raised his hand to his forehead it seemed like a flame, and he seemed to hear the voice of his wife, who died twenty years ago, calling, "Roque! Roque! Roque!" The teeth of the *alcalde* chattered with terror. He lost sight of the cupboard, the walls of the bedroom, and the objects about him, and saw in their place a million lights of all colors that were at first motionless and then began to dance violently. By dint of crossing and recrossing each other they formed solid circles—one blue, one red, one violet—that danced around him and became more striking than the solar spectrum. At last the circles also disappeared, leaving one single, luminous, hardly perceptible point. But that point slowly increased; it was first a star, then a moon, then an enormous sun that grew gradually larger as it assumed a blood-red hue. This sun increased and increased until its immense disk grew to the size of an ox, then it partially overshadowed him, then it covered him completely, and then he suddenly knew no more. And the good *alcalde*, indeed, saw no more, for in the morning he was found dead, with his head fallen forward, a case of apoplectic seizure.



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CHAPTER XV

EVENTFUL ARRIVAL IN SARRIO OF THE DUKE OF TORNOS, COUNT OF BUENA VISTA

SEÑOR ANSELMO, the conductor of the band of Sarrio, came to tell the President of the Academy that the *alcalde* threatened to stop the orchestra supplies if it attended St. Anthony's fair that afternoon.

"How is that?" asked Don Mateo, raising himself up in bed, where he still was, and stretching out his hand for his spectacles on a little table by his side. "Stop supplies! Why should he stop the supplies?"

"I don't know. Prospero has just sent to tell me so."

"What has the band's going to St. Anthony's fair to do with him?" he returned in a tone of irritation.

"I think it is because a gentleman is arriving to-day at Don Rosendo's, and as the fair will block the road——"

"Ah, yes, the Duke of Tornos; but what is that to do with it? Come, they are mad— Look here, leave me an instant. I am going to dress, and then I will go and see Maza. I dare say we shall be able to arrange matters. Leave me."

Señor Anselmo left the room, and quicker than could have been expected from his years and infirmities, Don Mateo appeared, ready to go out. His wife and his daughter were, as usual, at church. He asked for some breakfast.

"I cannot give it to you, sir. The señora has the keys, and there is no chocolate out."

"Always the same!" grumbled the old man, not so

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vexed as he ought to have been. "I don't know why she can't leave out what is necessary. It is true that I generally get up late, but there may be cases of important business, like to-day."

"Shall I go and ask for an ounce of chocolate from a neighbor?"

"No, there is no need. I am sure Matilda would be vexed. Is there nothing to eat handy?"

The servant did not answer for some seconds.

"No, señor; there is nothing. You know that the señora——"

"Yes, yes, I know."

Don Mateo went to the sideboard and began pulling open the drawers. Nothing—there was nothing but the table utensils: spoons, forks, corkscrew, etc.; but some chocolate drops and a plate of biscuits could be seen through the glass cupboard door.

"Caramba! if there were only a key," and drawing out his own bunch he proceeded to try the lock with each key on the ring, but his efforts were fruitless. At last in despair he readjusted his spectacles, put on his hat, and was starting off on his expedition, saying:

"Well, well, we will fast to-day."

But before arriving at the door he turned round and said abruptly to the maid:

"Is there any bread about?"

"The baker has not come yet, but you can have some of mine," returned the girl smiling.

"All right; let me see this bread of yours."

So they repaired to the kitchen, and the servant lifting the lid from the bread-pan, Don Mateo took out a moderate-sized piece of almost black rye bread.

"All right; I don't object to your black bread," he said, cutting himself a piece. "Health to the darkies,"

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he then added, with a jocoseness he had not ventured to display for years, as he swallowed a mouthful. The servant smiled, astonished at his good humor.

"It has more flavor than ours. If it were not quite so hard!"

He then brushed away the crumbs with his hand, readjusted his spectacles, and after taking a draught of water—for the wine was also locked up—he sallied forth in the direction of the Town Hall. The clock of the building was striking ten. He passed through the great portico, mounted the wide, stone staircase, and arriving at the corridor, where the dust was more than an inch thick, he asked Marcones, who came forward, for Don Gabino.

"Señor *alcalde* is sitting."

"Sitting! The deuce he is! At this hour?"

It was, in fact, a rare occurrence. Two years had elapsed since the death of Don Roque, and those of the Club who then took office at the Town Hall with Don Rufo as *alcalde* for more than a year and a half, were now reaping the consequences of subsequent defeat. They were still in the majority in the municipal corporation, but the Cabin party finally worked so effectively in Madrid that Gabino Maza was elected *alcalde*. It was said that this was due to the hateful treachery of Rojas Salcedo, who, noting at the previous municipal elections that the power of the Cabin party was on the increase, now went over to that side. Thus the storm of hatred and abuse passed upon him by the supporters of Don Belinchon was indescribable.

A fierce struggle ensued. Each sitting of the Town Council was a disgrace. The Maza party sued the ex-corporation for the depreciation of the funds, demanding reimbursement of the same.

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The members of the Belinchon party were quite sure that justice would be accorded them in the Audience Chamber, but on the principle that God helps those who help themselves they brought all possible influence to bear in their favor, and letters went to and from Madrid. The Cabin party was not, however, remiss in opposition on its side, and Maza made his opponents feel the force of his rod of power. As Don Rosendo's majority consisted only of two votes, Gabino spared no pains to rob him of them. Sometimes he convoked a special meeting when it was impossible for any one of them to come; at other times he sent false notices to certain councillors, saying that the session was postponed; at other times, when a measure was to be put to the vote, he, by common consent with his friends, made it in such an ambiguous way that it confounded Don Rosendo's supporters, and as it happened on more than one occasion, they voted against themselves. Moreover, he once had some councillors locked in the office and took away the key. After the dignitaries of the corporation were weary of calling out and hammering at the door, an official came and opened it, but the voting had taken place without them.

Thanks to these and other tactics, and countless acts of arbitrariness, the choleric ex-naval officer achieved his great object of avenging himself on his enemies. His strategy was chiefly exhibited in attacks where it hurt the most; that is to say, on their house property. If any member of the Club owned one or more houses in a street in which no friend of his own had any property, he ordered the architect of the corporation to level the road and make it lower, by which course the foundations of the houses were laid bare and the buildings were in danger of falling to the ground, to say nothing

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of the inconvenience of having to put ladders for ingress. Thus during the few months of his mayoralty there were more than twenty houses in Sarrio with the foundations exposed, and at other times he had the roads raised so that the houses were flooded when it rained.

Such freaks naturally excited a great commotion among Don Belinchon's partisans. Rabid diatribes appeared in "The Light," and incessant scenes took place at the municipal sessions. But Maza took it all quite quietly, and calmly pursued his urban reforms, receiving meanwhile the complaints of his victims with a cruel smile, and giving fierce, sarcastic replies to the speeches of the opposite party.

Marcones took Don Mateo into a room adjoining the sessional chamber. The people's gallery was too small to admit more than one decent-sized person; and, moreover, the disputes of those fighting cocks were of little interest to outsiders. The two notaries of the place were in friendly converse in the same room, Don Victor Varela and Sanjurjo; the first was a little old man, with prominent eyes and such a coarsely made wig that it looked like straw, and the other was a man of middle age, with a grayish mustache, afflicted with lameness from his birth. They greeted our old man like a great friend, and after the manner of people who see each other every day. Indeed, there was nobody in the town who could help greeting Don Mateo.

"You are waiting for the meeting to be over, eh?"

"Yes, señor," returned one of the two men, in so abrupt and cold a tone that the old gentleman felt no desire to pursue the subject further.

He sought for another topic, and hit upon sport as one more congenial to the tastes of the depositaries of public trust. Both were ardent sportsmen after quails,

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woodcock, etc., but their love of coursing was extreme. Directly any leisure time was at their disposal the swift, innocent animals were subjected to a fearful martyrdom at the hands of these notaries of the corporation, actively seconded by half a dozen greyhounds, kept half starved to quicken their pace.

To talk of hares was next door to heaven to Don Victor; as for Sanjurjo, to stand up to his waist in brambles and to start one was heaven itself.

"What a pity to lose such a day!" exclaimed Don Victor with a sigh as he looked through the window covered with dust.

"True," returned Sanjurjo with another sigh, "but I dare say the ground at Maribona is rather soft; there has been a good deal of rain the last few days."

"What does that matter?" said Don Mateo. "Now in this summer weather it soon gets dry, as the ground so readily absorbs the damp."

The lawyers looked at each other in dismay.

"Pépe la Esquila told me," he continued, "that the peasant folk have seen hares jumping about in Ladreda."

"Yes, we know," said Sanjurjo. "If it were not for some trifle to-day we should have gone off there," and he gave a sign of intelligence to Don Victor.

"Well, Pépe is going this morning with Fermo; I heard so yesterday evening."

The notaries looked at each other in alarm.

"What did I tell you, Sanjurjo?" exclaimed Don Victor.

"Well, I must confess the rogue has taken me in. Never mind, there will be some left. We will go to-morrow, you and I, Don Victor."

But the news had saddened them, and they preserved



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an obstinate silence. Excited voices and loud noises were audible in the chamber, whilst the sharp ting of the president's bell was constantly heard calling to order.

Don Mateo, feeling quite depressed at his inability to sustain the conversation, made another attempt with Sanjurjo.

"Well, man, I should not have thought you would have cared for sport with your lame leg."

"What, how? What are you thinking of? He runs like a greyhound," exclaimed Don Victor, with affectionate enthusiasm. "Directly he is on the track of a hare he ceases to be lame. And I say that he invented his lameness to excite pity. He is no more lame than you or I."

"If you could only make me well," returned Sanjurjo, smiling resignedly.

The joke put them all in good spirits. Don Victor recounted the feats of his friend on various occasions: "One day he went on all fours so as to run better. That was a sight."

"What," queried Don Mateo in astonishment, "on all fours?"

"Yes, it is a fact," returned Sanjurjo, laughing, and adding that he had learnt to run like that as a child, when his lameness was more pronounced, and prevented him being a match for his playfellows. Then he, on his side, spoke of Don Victor as a lazy fellow, who would scan every blade of grass to avoid taking an unnecessary step, whereupon Don Victor joined in the laugh against himself, saying that hares were not only started with the legs, but with the eyes as well.

"How many times has your obstinacy ended in failure? Do you recollect that St. Peter's Day three years

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ago, when you left me alone near Arceanes? Who started the hare then—you, who went off like the wind, or I, who remained quietly behind?"

The conversation now became more and more animated, to the great delight of Don Mateo, who could never bear to see any one look bored in his presence. When their cheerful talk made them oblivious to the shouts and ringing of the bell going on in the other room, the door was thrown open, and the majestic figure of Don Belinchon appeared in a state of excitement difficult to describe. His hair was disordered, some locks hanging about his face damp with sweat, his cheeks were aflame, his eyes glassy, and the bow of his cravat was undone.

"Sanjurjo, Sanjurjo, come here!" he said in a strange voice, without greeting or even seeing Don Mateo. The notary rose quietly from his seat, and entered the large room with him. Don Victor made no allusion to the sudden exit, but continued quietly talking on the same subject with Don Mateo, who did not dare to ask any questions. At the end of some time Sanjurjo reappeared, shut the door behind him, took his seat again, and continued his interrupted conversation.

But not many minutes elapsed before the door was again roughly opened, and the short, stout form of Don Pedro Miranda appeared in the same state of excitement as that of the former arrival.

"Don Victor, Don Victor, come here!"

He also neither greeted nor saw Don Mateo.

The notary quietly rose from his seat and followed him.

"What the devil does this mean?" asked Don Mateo of Sanjurjo when the door was closed.

The only reply was a scornful shrug of the shoulders.

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"What foolery!" grumbled Don Mateo. "Belinchon and Miranda never used to get so excited about these affairs of the corporation, and want to be *alcalde*!"

Things had indeed changed. The violent party feeling that both sides brought to bear in every province was in fuller force in the municipal corporation than anywhere. Maza's tyranny had so infuriated Don Rosendo's friends that they spared no means to contravene it. They wished at all costs to bring an action against him for his abuse of authority. To this end Belinchon had secured the services of the lawyer Sanjurjo, who constantly attended him at the sittings, and drew up statements and statements of the arbitrary conduct of the *alcalde*, all of which were sent to the courts of justice, but there they were blocked, thanks to the ill-will of the judge.

Then the Cabin party employed the other lawyer, who also drew up documents complaining of the insubordination of the majority, and of its carrying resolutions on subjects of which it knew nothing. When the sitting was over Mateo was taken into the *alcalde*'s room. He was found sipping a refreshing concoction which was considered good for the bile, but his system was greatly tried by his daily resort to this remedy for his disorder. He was in an excited, agitated state, for the sardonic smile and scornful calm adopted at the sittings were merely assumed, whilst his very vitals were consumed with rage, which seemed to turn his blood to gall. What trouble it cost him to repress those wild, blind outbursts of passion which assailed him at every step!

Two of his friends were discussing the meeting, whilst he, silent and livid, with dark circles under his eyes, stirred his concoction with a spoon. Don Mateo, as one

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of the very few persons who remained neutral in Sarrio, was received with frankness and affability.

"Take a seat, Don Mateo. What good news brings you here?"

The old man replied that he came to know if the report were true that the band would be put down if it attended the St. Anthony fair that afternoon. The face of Maza darkened. It was quite true that it could no longer count upon any support from the corporation if the instruments were taken out that afternoon from the Academy. Don Mateo asked:

"But why?"

After grinding his teeth as a preface to his remark, Maza replied that he did not wish to celebrate the arrival of a person who was coming that afternoon on a visit to Belinchon, for, he added:

"Don Quixote would be quite capable of thinking that the band had attended in honor of his guest."

"But, Gabino, as it has attended every year, nobody could think any such. You must bear in mind that this is the chief fair of the town, and that it will be very sad for the young people not to have a little dancing and amusement just then."

"They must do without it to-day. I am very sorry. If the band likes to go it can go, but it knows what it has to expect."

It was impossible to turn him from his decision. At first Don Mateo used persuasion, and then he grew angry, and with the privilege of his years and his unfailing good intentions, which nobody in the town could doubt, he told Maza and his two councillors present a few home truths, which neither they nor the choleric *alcalde* could deny.

"Perhaps you are right, Don Mateo; but what am

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I to do? A feud is a feud. Our self-respect is at stake. If we don't keep these rascals down they will have us down."

The old man left the consistorial building more sad than angry. The vexations and worries he had suffered of the kind during the last three years were innumerable. He could count on nobody to second him in any plan for festivities. In vain did he exert himself to get any operatic or dramatic company for the theatre; it soon fell to the ground, for if the Club element prevailed, the Cabin party withdrew, and *vice versa*. And as a general gathering is necessary for a theatrical performance, the actors went off half dead with hunger.

When Don Mateo went about begging for subscriptions, the first thing asked was:

"Has So-and-so subscribed, and So-and-so, and So-and-so?" And if he answered in the affirmative, the reply would be:

"Then do not count upon us."

Our good friend tried at last to win them over by diplomacy, but the implacable townfolk were too sharp for him, and they would not let him escape telling them who were going. And if this was so with regard to the theatre, it was much worse in the case of any artists pitching their tents in the town. There was a famous violinist, a man who played admirably on an instrument of wood and straw; four bell-ringers, brothers; a Moor, who exhibited two wise cows; an English scientist with a microscope; a celebrated Chinese giant, and a sea-calf that said "papa," "mama," etc. Don Mateo had patronized them all, but his canvassing campaigns on their behalf did not prove successful. All the curiosities, Spanish as well as foreign, knew by report our retired colonel, and directly they set foot in Sarrio they went

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to call at his house. He went with them to see the *alcalde*, introduced them at the Club, recommended them to the owner of the storehouse where they thought of exhibiting, and he nearly always headed the subscription to pay their journey, and not one of them left the town in former days without being pleased and satisfied; but now they all said their receipts did not pay for the flagstaffs. Don Mateo's right hand in all these festivities was Severino, of the ironmongery shop. Nobody in the province could equal him in the manufacture of beautiful, elegant, well-arranged decorations, nor in the difficult art of putting up green arches with lamps for the night, nor in his power of sending off rockets swiftly and perpendicularly. Well, this ingenious fellow, who had so delighted the town with his various inventions, had now been idle for some time.

"Severino, we must think of arranging something for the eve of St. Anthony."

"What, Don Mateo, what?" returned the shopkeeper in a depressed tone.

"An illumination of two hundred lamps, an orb, and a few rockets."

"Do you wish us to pay the expense, as we did at the festival of St. Engracia?"

"Perhaps the West Indians will pay this time," muttered Don Mateo.

"No; don't be so simple; you seem to forget what they are. Pay, indeed! Precious little will they pay!"

Everybody was rather unjust to the West Indians. They simply maintained a strict neutrality, and wondered that worthy men like Belinchon, Miranda, and others should excite themselves so much about things outside their respective occupations and businesses. That handful of calm people in the midst of the fierce

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contest which waged continually would have been like the chorus of Greek tragedies if only they had not been wanting in any exhibition of either joy or sorrow to either the successes or the reverses of the actors in question. The West Indians of Sarrio were utterly apathetic, dulled by their idle, monotonous life, in which the recollections of their quondam hard work and trials in Cuba sometimes filled them with horror, and added to their sense of comfort at their present circumstances. What did they care for the resolutions carried by the corporation, the attacks made in "The Light" and "The Youth of Sarrio," or the schisms with which the town was continually rent! Whilst they were left quiet to take a turn in the morning on the Mole (and there was no fear of that being disturbed), to play billiards or *tresillo* after dinner, and to take those famous walks in parties in the picturesque suburbs, they did not care for anything. So little interest did they take that they hardly ever mentioned the episodes of the feud when they were together. The only thing that could disturb them was the telegraphic notification of the rise and fall of the public funds in which their capital was placed. Otherwise they were model citizens, they gave no offence to anybody, and they only enjoyed what they had worked hard for with their hands. They did not give money to entertainments and performances. But this was not a grave offence, for they saw no necessity for such festivities. What in the world did people want more than to live in a pleasant climate and quietly to eat, work, and sleep the hours away? Besides, they had conferred a benefit on the town by conducting to the altar a number of ladies between the years of twenty-five and thirty, who without this unexpected deliverance would have been left to wither away on the stalk. Now they were almost all

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stout, quiet matrons, mothers of happy families, and managers of well-ordered houses.

These West Indians were the only people who escaped the incessant attacks of the press, for whatever antipathy was nourished by both parties against them, they did not dare make any public allusion to them, as they had no ground for doing so. They therefore had to content themselves with grumbling, and calling them money-laden asses behind their backs.

Thus in the course of three years Sarrio attained the height of perfection that had been the dream of Don Rosendo; that is to say, there was no longer any private life. The deeds of the townsfolk, be they of the most private or the most insignificant character, came to light in the press, and were the subject of censure, comment, and ridicule. Nobody was safe, even in the sanctuary of his home. If rather ugly words passed between a man and his wife, if he chastised his children with more or less severity, if he were short of money, if he were at all dissipated, if he dropped the *c's* in the middle of words and said *reto* and *pato* instead of *recto* and *pacto*, if he ate with his fingers or snored loudly: all these interesting details were recorded for the benefit of the public in "The Light" and "The Youth of Sarrio," sometimes directly, and other times by means of the famous Oriental stories already mentioned.

From the municipal chamber Don Mateo repaired to the Academy, where Señor Anselmo was waiting for him, and it was with great tact that he told him that the band was not to go out that afternoon.

By dint of negotiations and diplomacy he had so far managed to keep it going as well as the Lyceum, although no theatrical performances were now given there, neither was there any dancing, excepting on particular days,

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such as those of Candlemas, Carnival, and Santa Engracia; but by force of tact and energy Don Mateo had succeeded in making the majority of the members continue their monthly subscription of two pesetas. All the other places of recreation in which the town had been so rich had disappeared. The cause of all the excitement at the present time was the arrival of the Duke of Tornos.

The wide-awake, practical Don Rosendo found out through his agents in Madrid that the Duke of Tornos, Count of Buena Vista, related to the Royal family, former Ambassador in France, head major domo of the palace, etc., a person of much consequence in court and political circles, had decided to spend the summer in Sarrio for the benefit of the sea air, which was considered better for him than that of San Sebastian or Biarritz. When Belinchon heard of it he immediately wrote the duke a letter, placing his house at his disposal.

The duke naturally refused with many graceful expressions of gratitude, but Don Rosendo, who saw the great importance of the triumph of having such a personage under his roof, with whose assistance he counted on routing his adversaries, pressed the matter so much that the duke ended by accepting the invitation.

The Cabin party, having scented the impressive news, made Don Pedro Miranda also offer his house, promising to reimburse him for all the expense which he would thereby incur. But the duke was already engaged, and so was unable to accede to their request, pressing as it was, which fact filled them with rage, as we shall see. We must mention that the Duke of Tornos belonged to the Moderate party, and although in Sarrio neither the Club nor the Cabin party was very conversant with politics, as the local strifes absorbed all

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their attention, and their sympathies were always for the party in power, there was no doubt that liberal views prevailed at the Club, beginning with its enterprising chief, whilst at the Cabin they were more conservative. Therefore the favor conferred on the first was the more trying.

Don Rosendo had had an extra story built to his house the previous year. The birth of another grandchild had induced him to have it done. If the marriage continued to be so fruitful the house would soon be too small for the family. Gonzalo had talked of taking one for himself, as he wanted to be more independent, and to prevent this his father-in-law adopted this plan, and the new floor was built for the young family so that it should be independent. The staircase did not pass through the parents' quarters, although there was a little inner iron stairway, which facilitated communication between the two parts of the house. Gonzalo could enter and leave his dwelling without having to pass through his father-in-law's house, but they still had their meals together.

But when the Duke of Tornos accepted the invitation it was decided that he was to have the quarters of the young married couple, and they were to return to their old rooms. This was easily managed, for Venturita had furnished her domain so excessively luxurious that it was speedily and easily converted into an abode worthy of the personage who was to be the honored guest. The telegram from his secretary announcing his departure from Madrid was anxiously awaited at the Club, and the faces of all the members glowed with joy and triumph, and shone with the hope that they would soon be able to give some decisive blows to their adversaries, who went about with black, angry looks, although

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they tried to hide their vexation under a feigned ignorance of the magnitude of the event of the duke's arrival. It was not long before somebody came to tell Belinchon of the *alcalde's* cross-grained conduct about the music. He was at dinner when the news arrived, but with an admirable serenity that his enemies might have envied he finished the plate of soup before him, wiped his mouth, drank a glass of wine, wiped his mouth again, and quietly rose from the table without saying a word.

Like all the great leaders we read of in history, Don Rosendo never lost his dignity, and it was in critical moments like the present that he was inspired with the grandest ideas and the most helpful resolutions. He went at once to the telegraph office, and wired to the conductor of the orchestra at Lancia to come immediately to Sarrio and he would be well paid.

The conductor replied that they would be there that evening. "All right," he then said to himself; "if the music be not there to receive him, at least he shall have a serenade, and these wretches can rage as much as they like."

The arrival of the Duke of Tornos was, as we have seen, coincident with the fair of St. Anthony. The afternoon was like the morning, bright and clear, without the least heat, for the northeast wind of Sarrio and all Biscayan ports tempers the heat of the summer sun most delightfully. These fairs are frequented by all classes of society, more especially the artisans, so that they have retained their primitive, festive, cheerful character. From early morning numerous groups of girls leave the suburbs and cross the town to take the road to Lancia, clad in the classic black or colored merino skirt, with the flowered cotton handkerchief crossed in front and behind, low shoes, pearl earrings,

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and smooth, well-brushed, uncovered hair. Their merry talk and bright laughter awaken the quieter townfolk, still in bed, and make them smile at pleasant recollections of the St. Anthony days of their youth, when merriment had also shone in their eyes, and no drop of gall had yet fallen into their cup of life. What girl in Sarrio would not recollect some one of these journeyings to the hermitage on a soft, pleasant morning, when the feet seemed winged and the heart beat quickly at the thought of soon seeing and spending the day with the adored swain !

These maidens seemed to emit a waft of brightness which rose from the street to the houses, entered the windows, and invited them to leave for a few hours the heavy weight of business, ambition, envy, and all the low passions which make up the sum of human misery, and follow them in the enjoyment of the fresh morning air, the green fields, the incomparable rich milk sold at the hermitage, in the games of puss-in-the-corner and blind man's buff, in the languid *habaneras* (Spanish dances), Morana's sweet caramels and cakes, and, what was better still, the kisses of somebody, when the face was not ugly and the *mostacho* not too obtrusive.

Pablito sallied forth in the early morning, accompanied by his faithful *Piscis*, both mounted on fine spirited horses, which of course pirouetted from side to side. A weighty reason added to his equestrian propensity made him use this mode of transport. Young Belinchon had not frequented any fairs for the past year, and avoided going on foot. He seldom left the house, especially at night, and only traversed the most frequented streets, and then very rarely alone. He had hidden and bitter enemies. Valentina, the fair, vivacious sempstress, had sworn by all the saints of heaven



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to plant a dagger in his back. It is needless to say the reason why. After having ruined her he had abandoned her and gone elsewhere, like a careless, gaudy butterfly which flies from flower to flower. It had cost him some trouble, or rather some alarm. When he heard of his lover's oath, which did not surprise him, as he knew her character so well, he tried to avoid an early, wretched death by sending different emissaries to her with offers of sums of money, her maintenance without work, and suggesting to take and bring up the child. The angry sempstress indignantly rejected all these offers, repeating her horrible, bloodthirsty oath each time an ambassador came to see her. Naturally our handsome youth felt rather qualmish under the circumstances, and he would have given his carriage and horses to have had eyes at the back of his head. He made the best of those he had, and whenever he went out on foot he exhausted himself in looking about him. But confidence came with time, for as Valentina scarcely ever left home, and never frequented balls and fairs since her trouble, nobody had seen her. So Pablito, never meeting her on the street, felt emboldened by the suggestion of Piscis to go to the *fête* of St. Anthony.

Thus they mounted early, and took the wide, dusty Lancian road, shaded for some distance from the town by majestic giant elms. The road inclined, without being very steep, and on both sides was the smiling district of Sarrio, bordered by two or three lines of undulating hills, with the mountains of Narcin in the distance rising above the valley of Lancia still lying in mist.

Looking back after going some distance, the beautiful town was seen bathed in the sunlight, which brightened the white fronts of the houses, whilst the vast expanse

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of the sea, touched by the oblique rays of the rising sun, presented a milky white appearance.

The horses of our equestrians, in the pride of their beautiful breed and their bright, shining backs, caracolled incessantly, which ostentatious display of their muscular power in the morning light raised clouds of dust. The work-girls who were making their way to the hermitage grew impatient, and chaffed the riders more from vexation at the dust than from fear of the horses; and taunts in somewhat bad taste were cast at the severe Piscis, who turned a deaf ear to them, so absorbed was he in the contemplation of the hoofs of the horses, as their right elevation had been entrusted to his training.

"Bah! the road is too narrow for him!"

"I say, curé, don't kick up such a dust! On horse-back you think yourself somebody, but you look like a puppy-dog. You fancy yourself a duke, and you look like a monkey."

They did not interfere with Pablito. The bizarre youth exercised the same fascination over the work-girls as he did over the young ladies. Not only were they attracted by his fine figure, his gallantry and his riches, but also, and perhaps chiefly, by his conquests. The number of adorers he had had in all classes made an aureole of glory round his head. There had been much talk against him among the artisans on account of the affair with Valentina; they called him false, traitor, rogue; but all of them, even the friends of the victim, admired him in secret, and would have required little persuasion to fall, themselves, into his arms, much as they swore and declared that she had been very foolish to think anything of that flirt.

Pablito pursued his way in a serious mood, also busy

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with his skittish quadruped. Nevertheless, he occasionally deigned to smile slightly, and this suspicion of a smile so excited the girls that they threw additional fire and wit into their attacks on the invulnerable Piscois.

About two miles on there was a beautiful open green space crossed by the road, which was to be the scene of the festivities in the afternoon, when the people came from the town and the others returned from the hermitage. To go to the hermitage one had to leave the high-road and take the narrow, steep paths bound by little stone walls covered with briars. A mile further on one came on to another open space on the top of the little hill where the shrine stood. The view from thence was beautiful and unequalled. There was an immense expanse of sea-coast, not flat, but hilly, planted in some places with maize, in others with corn, and in most places only with grass, and intersected by the long, dusty road of Lancoia, with its dark, level line of gigantic elms terminating in the pink and white line of the town.

By the shrine young women from the neighborhood, with more than one satin-cheeked, ruddy-lipped peasant girl, were selling milk in little earthenware mugs. There were also tables covered with cloths spread with *biscochos* (milk biscuits flavored with cinnamon) and other *confetti* of ancient renown. The chief feature of the *fête* was to drink milk in the morning at the hermitage, play with the mugs, and then break them by rolling them down the hill. At twelve o'clock they ate the provisions brought with them, and then repaired to the walnut grove, the usual scene of the gathering. Pablito did not omit a single item of the programme. He bought more than a dozen mugs of milk and a great quantity of biscuits, with which he laid siege to his friends, and then played with them so roughly that they often lost

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their footing and he fell with them onto the ground, to the great delight of the onlookers. He was most assiduous in his attentions to a very pretty, dark young girl, daughter of Maroto the policeman, who sold fish in the market-place, to whom the reader will recollect Periquito said, in the pit of the theatre, "Ramona, I love you," to the great amusement of Piscois and Pablo. When the hour came for repairing to the walnut grove he tried to put her upon his horse in front of him. The girl resisted a little, but at last she gave in, for there was no help for it. So the youth arrived with her in the midst of the *fête*, to the applause and hurrahs of his friends, whilst the other girls expressed disapproval, and looked scandalized, although they were the first to succumb to the charms of the handsome sultan when they were the objects of his attentions. At three o'clock the walnut grove was full of visitors. The vast green formed an emerald ground upon which the kerchiefs of the women, white, red, and yellow, in continual motion, formed a movable design in brilliant colors. Fresh arrivals came by the high-road from Sarrio, and dispersed on the green on both sides. The roar of conversation, like the waves of the sea, was audible a little distance off, and the sharp twang of the guitar could be heard above the dull, monotonous sound and ring of the tambourine. There were some tents with rough plank tables loaded with swollen goatskins of wine, like victims prepared for sacrifice, surrounded by numerous groups of men. Then on the green there was a large crowd of both sexes, in the centre of which the dance of the country was going on to the sound of the castanets and with the motions peculiar to the district. The dance continued five or six hours without any pause whatsoever. They perspired freely, but they were never

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fatigued. The men might be so sometimes, the women never. Those who danced so much were country girls from the neighboring villages, who returned home by the cross-roads without passing through the town.

The artisans of Sarrio made up parties for the *giral-dilla* (a Spanish country dance), in which they sang in loud voices as they opened and closed the lines, leaving in the middle now a group of women, now a group of men. The young gentlemen knowing the girls through the dances at the schools, and accustomed to the pleasure, did not wish to relinquish their right of monopoly in the open air, and so they joined them, although they danced without grace with loose arms and stiff legs. Then a little further off the artisan lads danced with the girls who were either neglected by the gentlemen, or being of a superior calibre, cast scornful looks in their direction, and preferred their own class.

It must not be thought that fashionable dances were omitted that afternoon. Don Mateo having sought for a substitute for the orchestra, had come upon an Italian harpist and violinist, and had paid them to play out of his own pocket. So there, in a corner of the green, under an immense walnut tree, within a rope barrier, were a dozen closely clasped couples giving occasional turns to the measure of the sweet *habanera*, surrounded by a large crowd of spectators.

The young ladies smiled derisively at this rough imitation of their own dances, and felt sorry that such handsome young men should dance with such awkwardness. But when any of the party ventured to ask one for a turn, she, after a little demurring, laughing and blushing, and such like, to show that the act was purely one of condescension, took the arm of the swain and joined in the dance.

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Gonzalo came to the *fête* on foot with Cecilia, the eldest child, and the nurse. And as the road was long and steep, he carried his little girl almost all the way to prevent her getting tired. Ventura hated *fêtes*; besides, her father had taken the carriage to meet the Duke of Tornos, and to think of going nearly two miles on foot was a monstrous idea. Doña Paula could not go either, for she had been delicate for some time, and the doctors thought that weakness and her want of health were due to a defect of circulation, a cardiacal affection which might turn serious at any time, although not so at present. Cecilia had wanted to release Gonzalo from his burden during the walk, but he had laughingly said:

"You, you little skeleton," for so he called her jokingly; "be quiet, and don't let me have to carry you, too."

And so they arrived like husband and wife, and proceeded to wander over the green, stopping every instant to greet friends they met. They bought sweets for the child, they stood looking at the dancing to the guitar, then they stopped by the *giraldilla*, and finally they went to where the harp and the violin were being played, and there they saw Pablo among the dancing couples, with his arm encircling the form of the beautiful Ramona. Certainly the fantastic youth seemed a little confused when he saw them, and turning to his sister, he asked:

"Is mama here?"

Cecilia made a negative gesture, and he was reassured.

The child being soon tired of watching the dancing, asked to return to the peasants' dance. So recrossing the high-road, they went back to the gayeties on the other side, which was very fortunate for them, for just

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at that moment a fearful blood-curdling scene befitting a romantic tragedy was enacted on the spot they had quitted.

Pablito was dancing with his dark young lady, serene in his enjoyment of cutting a good figure. His face, always fresh-looking, was now extremely bright, not so much from physical exercise as from emotional excitement under the sensuous strains of the dance music. Ramona also, as scarlet as a poppy, leant her chin, embellished with two ravishing dimples, on his shoulder, when she was suddenly horror-struck at the sight of a livid face with two flaming eyes, and Pablito heard a discordant cry behind him:

"Take that, villain!" and at the same time he felt a sharp dig in his back. He turned quickly round, and saw the fury-fraught, distorted face of Valentina, brandishing a weapon in her hand. The youth thought he was mortally wounded and fell to the ground with deathly signs upon his countenance. A crowd of people immediately hastened to raise him, while others caught hold of the sempstress. As he was being carried to a neighboring cottage, Pablito thought he heard the cries of Valentina, who was trying to free herself from her captives, doubtless still anxious to kill him.

The news spread through the *fête*. Many people ran to the scene. Cecilia and Gonzalo, seeing the excitement, asked what it was about; and a friend, who knew the truth, told them that there was only a dispute among the peasants, and so managed to get them away.

In the meanwhile the doctor from a neighboring village, who was there, was asked to go and dress the wound. He was a young man fresh from the lecture hall. The first thing he did was to take off the youth's

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coat by cutting it down the back, and doing the same with his waistcoat and shirt, and when the flesh was bared he could not help laughing:

"What a wound! There is nothing to be seen."

In fact, the little penknife with which the sempstress had attempted his assassination had pierced his coat, his waistcoat, and his shirt; but as to the flesh, it had been left intact. Pablo was greatly relieved to find himself still in the land of the living. Then the woman of the house temporarily stitched up his shirt and he put on the doctor's coat whilst Piscis went to fetch the horses. Pablo left the house by the back way, and struck across the fields so as not to be seen, for he was not only ashamed of being seen in that dreadful garb, but he was filled with horror at the recollection of the baneful words of Valentina, for if he remembered rightly (and his faint condition had not been conducive to a great feat of memory), the sempstress had cried, when he was carried away by the four men:

"Get along, brute; and if I have not killed you now, somebody will soon do so."

Pablito was in such deadly fear of being assassinated by an unknown hand that he would not stay a minute longer at the fair, and when he reached the road, where Piscis was waiting for him, he mounted his horse and lost no time in regaining the town. The sun was sinking. Some of the people began leaving the fair, when there was a great excitement at the sight of six or eight carriages coming along the road from Lancia. It was the Duke of Tornos and his suite. In an open carriage he was seated with his secretary and the great patrician, Don Rosendo. In the next carriage came Don Rufo, Alvaro Peña, and two gentlemen from Lancia; and in the others were Don Rudesindo, Navarro, Don Jeronimo

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de la Fuente, and several other partisans of the illustrious Belinchon followed in the other vehicles.

On arriving at the walnut grove the duke was astonished at the sight of the motley crowd assembled on the green. He was a man of forty-six years of age, with flaccid cheeks of a sickly hue, a drooping lower lip, expressive of boredom and disdain; his cold, glassy, squinting eyes had a vacant expression, and in one of them he had an eye-glass fixed which gave an excessively impertinent look to his repulsive face. He had no beard, but a long mustache with waxed ends. He dressed in a style never seen in the country; that is to say, with the capricious originality of those who do not follow, but set the fashions. He wore a white American hat with a wide brim. He had a yellow shirt, lilac-colored gloves, and instead of a cravat a white handkerchief tied in the scarf form, with a great pearl pin.

"Delightful! delightful!" he exclaimed at the sight of the picturesque scene, languidly raising his eyelids. His voice was weak, and his enunciation low and labored, as if he were applauding from his box the trills of some prima donna at the Royal Theatre.

Don Rosendo gave him an explanation of the *fête*; he pointed to the steep hill leading to the shrine, which was visible in the distance; then he directed his attention to the different groups of dancers.

"There, Señor Duke, they are dancing to the strains of the guitar and tambourine; it is the characteristic dance of the country. Over there are the *giraldivillas*, in which the town girls dance as they sing. There they drink; those are the tables where sweetmeats are sold. Under that walnut tree they are dancing *habaneras*. . . . See, see, Señor Duke, it is the classic dance of our country—the men on one side, the women on the other; they

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go on quietly for hours and hours, singing the old ballads. It is a chaste dance, as you acknowledge."

"Delightful! delightful!" repeated the duke in his drawling tone, directing his eye-glass chiefly at the *giraldillas*. The Duke of Tornos was right. Few more cheerful, beautiful sights could be seen in any other spot on earth.

The *fête* waxed frenzied at its close. The guitar accentuated its sharp, strident tones, which vibrated in the far distance, accompanied by the persistent, dull sound of the tambourine; the young girls, excited and hot, with their cheeks on fire and their hair in disorder, not only sang, but shouted as they revolved in the *giraldilla*, and waxed desperate at the cessation of the enjoyment so seldom at their command. Those who had been indulging in wine also joined in the cries, with nasal sounds, as they tried to maintain their equilibrium upon the grass. And the lads and lasses of the *danza-prima*, in increasing excitement, raised the tone of the long, monotonous songs. Even the Italian harpist and violinist dashed into a mazurka, of which the couples showed their appreciation by kicking out wildly on the grass.

Light was leaving the picture, and as it faded a mysterious poetic charm pervaded the scene and reminded one of the happy retreats of old Arcadia.

It seemed as if the people ought to live and die thus in perpetual happiness and youth. Why leave the spot, why withdraw from that happy retreat to return to the fatigues of daily life, the anxieties and cares of business? To enjoy, in innocence of heart and feelings, health and the sublime harmonies of life and sound; to enjoy the delights of love, the root of all things; to enjoy the force that maintains the cohesion of the universe; to enjoy

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the plumage of the birds, the murmur of the streams, the scent of the flowers, the dew of the fields, the foam of the sea, the eternal blue of the skies: for this it is to be created a man, not to fill the brief days of one's ephemeral existence with bitter vengeance, pale jealousy, and gnawing depression. The tradition of Paradise is the most ancient and logical of human traditions. The sun now gilded the tops of the walnut trees which surrounded the green and cast long shadows upon the ground. A slight shudder of cold and melancholy ran through the company, which those who were heated with dancing or wine vainly strove to resist. It soon permeated the whole assembly. Voices were heard of mothers calling to their children, and of brothers to their sisters; groups were formed that waited for a moment to see if their party was complete before starting off. The first to break up were the *giraldillas*; the singing and dancing went on, for as the peasant folk had not so far to go in returning to their homes, they had no fear of nightfall. The people collected by the carriages in the middle of the road. The duke turned his *lorgnon* in all directions, looking at the preparations of departure with the eye of a connoisseur in painting. At last, seeing the great crowd assemble from all sides, he gave orders to go on slowly in the wake of the crowd, as he wished to see everything, not because it was beautiful, but because it was new to him.

The carriages then proceeded in the midst of the crowd, surrounded by affectionate couples in intimate converse; old men leading children by one hand and carrying handkerchiefs full of sweetmeats in the other; groups of girls interchanging their experiences in loud voices, with much laughter. As soon as they had gone a little distance from the walnut grove, the canticles,

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which were the chief features of the *fêtes* of the neighborhood, commenced. The artisans are with reason proud of their voices. They generally sing some sentimental song to a drawn-out, melancholy tune, an harmonious accompaniment being given by the seconds in thirds; at other times, when the party is larger, they use the traditional street ditties, which are various and delightful. That they did on this occasion. The duke was surprised at hearing the chorus of fresh voices incessantly repeating simple couplets like the following:

" I was high above
In the tower of love;
The foundations rumbled,
But I never tumbled.

" Why should the poor
Call at your door,
When your palm never itches
To give of your riches?"

But the puerile ideas of the lines acquired in their mouths an undue importance. They seemed solemn phrases, mysterious and wondrous formulas that no outsider could enter into without sacrilege. The air seemed filled with those sweet, drawn-out sounds; an indescribable feeling pervaded the singers from whose mouths they fell; each time they repeated them with more tenderness, with more unction, as they colored them with those poetic sentiments which always fill their hearts, and are transmitted from mothers to daughters in the romantic Biscayan town. It was the melancholy of those who apprehend the world of beauty, love it, and are forced by circumstances to live and die far from it. Between the couplets there was a silent pause, filled with the tramp of feet. The choir seemed to be in a waking

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dream, only alive to the vague feelings which the song aroused in the depths of their hearts.

Night fell suddenly. The branches of the high elms stood out clearly in the diaphanous atmosphere, but the shadows cast upon the road became darker. The landscape had lost its color, and the bluish hue of the tracts planted with corn were hardly distinguishable in the shades of evening. The great sweep of the ocean in the distance was now indistinct. The brilliant blue of mid-day had changed into a metallic greenish gray. The choir soon shook off its melancholy. A young girl started a bright, merry air, and the others willingly joined in, as if glad to awake from a sad dream:

“Do not bewail
That you must fail
To go to Anthony Fair,
There to tread on air ;
For lo ! it is raining,
And you'll be complaining
That no more you will get
The dress now so wet.”

This was sung with the eager shout of enthusiasm usual with such songs, and a few minutes after its conclusion an improvised couplet, illustrating the present situation, followed:

“Come to St. Anthony Fair;
There you will stare ;
A duke to see
As polite as can be.
The girls laughed and ran
To see such a great man.”

And thenceforth the magnate was introduced into the songs; and he, turning his eye-glass from right to left,

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and shaking his head with a benevolent smile, repeated in a low voice:

"Delightful! delightful! A Teniers picture! a Lorena's landscape!"

By the time they reached the town night had closed in. The duke with his secretary withdrew to the rooms prepared for him by Don Rosendo. The secretary was a young man of six-and-twenty, pale, and red-haired, whose undeveloped brain contained no idea beyond that of the colossal importance of the duke, and the imperious necessity of becoming a personage, if not of so much consequence, yet important enough to also have a secretary. Beyond these ideas the world had no other meaning for Cosio, for such was his name.

When the magnate had rested a little he came down to dinner in the orthodox evening dress. Cosio did the same. Don Rosendo had changed the Spanish hour of dinner for the French. Seeing him enter in evening dress, the Belinchon family were much upset. It was evident that Belinchon, his son, and his son-in-law had made a mistake in not dressing. Venturita mentioned the fact in a cross, low tone to her husband, but he only shrugged his shoulders and moved his lips in a scornful way. He was out of temper, for when asking his wife why the table had been laid without a place for the child, she had rudely said:

"But, Gonzalo, don't be silly! Do you want the child to dine to-day with us?"

"Why not?"

Venturita was shocked, and then she laughingly asked him if he had learned those fashions in the regatta clubs in England. This had so put him out that he did not feel inclined to show the duke the respect and deference due to him. His wife, on the contrary, had been busy

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for days preparing for the reception of the illustrious visitor.

The staff of servants had been increased at her suggestion and under her directions, and the men-servants were put into livery.

When Gonzalo saw Pachin, an old retainer, in his uniform, he burst out laughing, which greatly excited the ire of his wife. She also instituted a new, aristocratic arrangement of Belinchon's table, with the introduction of dessert knives and forks, fish knives, and lithographed cards for the menu, besides other innovations hitherto unknown at the meals of the house. The foreign element also modified the healthy, patriarchal, abundant fare which we saw at the beginning of this story.

Ventura appeared in the drawing-room with a low-necked blue silk dress and bare arms. She had learned, we know not where, that at formal dinners ladies should be *décolletée*. Doña Paula did not go so far as that, but she was gorgeously dressed in bright-colored materials that formed a sad contrast to her thin face, wasted by illness. The only guests were Alvaro Peña and Don Rufo. Pachin, the good Pachin, in his new livery, opened the door and said, with a sonorous voice, in which he had been drilled by Ventura:

"Dinner is served!"

The duke offered his arm to Doña Paula, and they all repaired to the dining-room. The hostess took the chief place, in accordance with her daughter's previous injunction. The duke sat at her right hand, Don Rufo at her left, and the others took their seats as they liked. Venturita was found at the right hand of the distinguished guest, then came Alvaro Peña, Cosio, Pablito, and Don Rosendo, while Gonzalo sat by the side of Cecilia.

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Then the dinner began with stiff ceremony and long intervals of silence. They were all oppressed and overwhelmed with the grandeur of the guest. The thin hair on the back and the side of the duke's shiny bald head was still black in spite of his forty-six years. His slightest movements were the object of the company's admiring attention, and his remarks were received by the company with smiles of delight and adulation.

The first words that fell from his lips after a few conventional courtesies expressed his admiration of the suburbs of the town.

"I only know the provinces in the north," he said in a slow, drawling tone. "I find this much superior to that in the way of scenery; it offers more variety, richer coloring, and there are lovely spots in the district we have traversed, comparable to the most enchanting scenes in Switzerland. Then on arriving at the coast there is the same softness of outline, the same sweetness of atmosphere as in the south of Italy."

"Oh, Señor Duke, you are too flattering! Pure kindness, Señor Duke. In the summer this country is all very well, but in winter!"

Don Rosendo, Alvaro Peña, and Don Rufo, overwhelmed with joy and gratitude, blushed, and disclaimed the encomiums as if they had been the objects of them. The duke continued speaking, as if he had not heard their exclamations.

"It is more hilly than the northern provinces, the tones are more marked. I saw from the Lancian road, looking eastward, a group of mountains with the summits still covered with snow, which was truly beautiful. It only wants a few lakes, and foreigners would resort to it."

"We have a lake in the west of the province," said Peña.

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"A lake?" queried the duke, as he raised his eyelids to look at the interlocutor.

"Yes, señor; the lake is called Nordon."

Then the duke kept his glassy gaze fixed upon the officer until he grew confused, and after bringing each person at the table into the focus of that gaze, he continued:

"In my gallery at Bourges I have a landscape, by Backhuysen, with a background very similar to that of these mountains. Only in the foreground there is a lake surrounded with briers. On the right there are some swans swimming on the water, and on the left there is a boat with two young peasants. I bought it merely for the delicacy of the coloring."

"The señor duke seems to like good pictures," said Don Rufo, stretching his mouth from ear to ear to speak with a befitting smile.

"And who does not like them?" returned the magnate, looking at him with his squinting eyes.

"Oh, yes, señor . . . it is true . . . you are very right! Everybody likes them. But it is an expensive taste . . . only great people like the señor duke can allow themselves the luxury."

Don Rufo here became confused, thinking he had said something disrespectful.

"The señor duke has many pictures of the best painters from what I hear," said Don Rosendo, coming to his friend's assistance.

"I have a few," returned the nobleman, pouring some water into Venturita's glass. This act overwhelmed the girl with gratitude, and the blood rushed to her face.

"The duke's is one of the first galleries in Europe," said Cosio in a low voice to Peña.

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"I like painting because it is the national art," continued the magnate. "It is the only one in which we have really advanced; it is the only one in which we distinguish ourselves in the present day . . . because, although I have spent a great deal of my life abroad, I am very fond of my country," he added in a patronizing tone, with a slight smile.

If the country could have heard those fine words it would doubtless, like Venturita, tremble for joy.

"I love it notwithstanding I acknowledge its backward condition. Nature has endowed us liberally with rich gifts. A fertile country—not so much so as is commonly believed, but, in short, fertile—admirably situated at one side of Europe, stretching her hand to America across the seas; a sky—oh, the sky! There is not another like it. The air has here, above all in the south, a transparency . . . oh, an infinite transparency! The despair of painters. Then this transparency gives greater purity to the outlines; nowhere do points stand out as they do here. In Castile the towers are visible many miles off, and as distinct as if they were only a few steps distant. It is quite evident that this is due to its being above the level of the sea."

"The countries which lie much higher than the level of the sea are the least intelligent," remarked Don Rufo, glad to air his physiological mania.

The duke turned his head to look at the speaker, and then went on as if he had not heard him.

"Then the great power of the sun throws up the contrast between the light and the shade, and gives a distinct outline even to the distant mountains. Only here in the north the vapors floating in the atmosphere rather blur and confuse the contours, and make them misty. But, on the other hand, the tones are richer; in the

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south the shades of the ground are lost in the excessive brilliance of the sky in the universal sense of light. But here what an immense variety of shades! Oh, infinite beauty! Then what power, what changes! In the south the tone is stationary; the immutable light of the sky keeps it the same for many hours, and the same one day as another; but in these provinces, where the light changes every minute, the color varies, too; the composition is perfect, the gradations of color *fondues*, its general tone is transformed into strong reliefs."

The duke having commenced enumerating the advantages possessed by the Spaniards, could not leave the subject of contour, light, and color, and lost himself in disquisitions on landscape, to which the company listened without understanding, with open eyes and idly moving lips.

But without ceasing talking he attended to Venturita, anticipating her wishes, pouring water into her glass, handing her the condiments, the bread, or anything she might want, signing to the servant to give her wine when he noticed that her glasses were empty, and all with the easy, polished ways of a man accustomed to society. Venturita accepted these attentions shyly and smilingly, and trembling with gratitude, without understanding that at that moment she was nothing to the magnate but the lady on his right.

Gonzalo, not feeling well disposed to the egregious guest, became tired of the monologue on painting, and exchanged a few whispered remarks with his sister-in-law, joking her as usual on her small appetite.

"Come, bag of bones, another cutlet. Don't be ashamed because the señor is here. We told you that he will not be astonished at the quantity you eat. Constitutions like yours require a little fat."

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Cecilia, smiling, replied with broken words, with respectful glances at the duke; and he, having noticed that they had spoken, raised his eyes and gave them a vacant, contemptuous look. The second time, particularly as Gonzalo and Cecilia put their table-napkins to their mouths to stop the sound of their laughing, the glance of the nobleman was longer, colder, and more abstracted than ever. Venturita showed her annoyance with her eyes, but Gonzalo, either from a wish to avenge his wife's former slighting remarks, or because he really did not feel the shyness and awe with which the personage inspired the others, did not desist from joking with his sister-in-law and making her laugh.

The affectionate feeling between the brother and sister-in-law had not decreased. Gonzalo and his children were the especial care of Cecilia. Her beneficial, sweet influence was felt every moment of their lives. The eldest little girl, Cecilita, now two years and a half old, and the other, Paulina, who was eight months old, throve under their aunt's maternal warmth of affection: she washed them, she dressed them, she took them out to walk, she was the first to teach them to pray. The mother, fond as she was of her children, soon wearied of them; their crying worried her; and when it was a question of keeping them quiet she was ignorant of any method of doing so, and only ended by half suffocating them with caresses.

Thus it came about that "auntie" was the refuge to which they ran, and for which they cried in any distress. Sometimes Ventura, wounded at this preference, grew jealous, and made them stay with her by force, but this only resulted in making them afraid of her.

As to Gonzalo, he had in Cecilia a sister and a mother, ever ready to save him discomfort and to remove all

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thorns from his path; she always had a soothing effect upon him, and he would go to her like a great spoilt child, annoyed if his wishes were not immediately complied with, and not sparing her in any way.

But the bond between him and his wife remained firm and unchanged; his passionate admiration, which had made him commit the first sin of his life, had not abated in spite of everything; she was still the orbit of his life. Ventura kept her hold over him by the power of her beauty, which continued to fascinate his senses. Cecilia understood it all, and when the young man, wounded by some neglect or some unkind word of his wife, broke out in complaints against her, she smiled sadly, and tried to calm him, while she was sure that her brother-in-law would soon lower himself by going to his wife in contrition and shame to kiss her very feet.

When the nobleman had finished his monologue a few minutes' silence ensued. Then, as if recollecting he had been remiss, he assumed a benevolent interest in his companions' affairs,

"So Señor Don Rufo Pedroso is a doctor, eh? The practice of medicine is arduous, especially in the provinces where, as a general rule, it does not meet with due compensation. Señor Peña is a sailor, is he not? Oh, the naval profession has always been brilliant. It is a pity that our war material is not equal to the bravery and skill of the officers. They have a hard time of it. Does the command of a harbor give much to do? I thought of bringing before the Senate a motion asking for the construction of two ironclads. And Pablito, does he have a good time in Sarrio? What resources does the town offer to young men?" Had he been in Madrid? He was fond of horses. Ah, riding was a grand exercise! The duke could well sympathize with

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that taste. Were his horses Spanish or foreign? He asked all these questions in an abstracted way, with an artificial smile, as if he were reciting a lesson. In fact, the most trying point of his code of manners was the necessity of recollecting that one has to make one's self agreeable to people with whom one is conversing, and to take an interest in their affairs.

He cast a cold glance at Gonzalo and Cecilia, but he directed no questions to them. When the unpleasant task of conventionality was accomplished the magnate resumed his eternal monologue. This time it was not on painting, but on archæology. In Lancia he had seen a Byzantine chapel, which had excited his attention by its purity, not having at present been at all restored. The cathedral was not bad, only the tower was too wide; evidently it was originally higher, but its dimensions had doubtless been changed when rebuilt after its destruction by lightning. He understood that Sarrio had a very beautiful church in the florid style of architecture. Whilst the duke continued this drawling, learned, endless disquisition, Don Rosendo evinced by his eyes and gestures that he was consumed with an anxiety which he vainly strove to conceal. Three times he had asked a question of the servant in a low voice, and three times he had received the answer also in a low voice.

The duke having concluded his archæological monologue, with the perspicacity of the conceited, who know whom they fascinate and whom they do not, then addressed his conversation to Venturita. The remarks were now made with a little more animation, and the illustrious guest occasionally deigned to smile, and to do his fair interlocutor the honor of raising his drooping eyelids to give her a look of curiosity and admiration. The girl was filled with pride at this mark of favor,

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and with crimson cheeks and bright eyes she talked so naively and prettily that the duke was quite delighted with her. They seemed to be talking of painting, for Cecilia and Gonzalo, who were still joking together, heard her say:

"Oh, Rubens! What flesh-painting! Rubens is the Cervantes of painting."

Gonzalo turned his head as if he had been struck, whilst his face expressed his astonishment.

"Cecilia, where did my wife learn all that?" he asked his sister-in-law.

A shrug of the shoulders was the only reply. But Venturita had noticed Gonzalo's movement, his surprise, and the remark he made to Cecilia. She colored, and lowered her voice; then seeing her husband's mocking expression, returned it with a quick, angry look.

In the meanwhile Doña Paula talked to Don Rufo about her heart complaint; Cosio took pride in describing to Pefia and Pablito all the grandeur and luxury of the Castle of Bourges, where the duke had his famous picture gallery. Only Don Rosendo remained silent, getting more restless every minute, and making little balls of bread with his nervous fingers. Suddenly his fine features expanded into a benevolent smile, for all heads were simultaneously raised at the sound of a loud trumpet in the street—it was the band from Lancia, arrived at last.

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CHAPTER XVI

NOTEWORTHY DEEDS OF THE DUKE OF TORNOS IN SARRIO

"THE LIGHT" the following Thursday was almost entirely devoted to panegyrics on the Duke of Tornos : the first part gave his biography, the second a description of his arrival at the fair, and the romantic way he was accompanied to the town by its most beautiful maidens to the sound of triumphal song and music ; then reference was made to this event in the verses by one of Don Rufo's sons ; and finally there figured in the third part of the paper two or three striking paragraphs about the illustrious arrival. "The Youth of Sarrio," on the contrary, only noticed his arrival in a short, cold article called "Welcome." But the opportunity was taken to deal a spiteful double-edged thrust at its enemies. The article described Don Rosendo taking the duke to the Club and introducing him to its chief members, and this gave the ground for great fun to be made of Don Rudesindo, Don Feliciano Gomez, Alvaro Peña, Don Rufo, and other worthy persons. The account excited great indignation among all Belinchon's friends, and fired their hearts with revengeful feelings, and its well-turned spiteful phrases caused it to be universally attributed to Sinforoso Suarez.

What ? Was not Sinforoso the chief editor of "The Light," the faithful friend and follower of Don Rosendo ? No ; not now. He left his old friends about a

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year ago and went over to the enemy's side, which, trading on his weak disposition and the ruling passion of his soul, put the screw on, and seconded by his father and others, told him that there would be no career open to him as long as he belonged to the Club party, for in attacking the religious ideas of the place he shut himself out from all respectable houses and all conquests of the fairer sex, and he was bribed with the vague prospect of a brilliant marriage with one of Maza's daughters. So finally, to the surprise and astonishment of the town, he deserted his friends and patrons, and in the space of four-and-twenty hours he exchanged the editorship of "The Light" for a place on the staff of "The Youth of Sarrio."

This act, however, was not consummated with impunity, for when Alvaro Peña met him the next time in the Rua Nueva at mid-day, he loaded him with imprecations, and, what was worse, his fist left marks on his face. The punishment was so humiliating that Sinforoso, who was lacking in neither pride nor bravery, was filled with a burning desire for vengeance against his fierce assailant. Arming himself with a bar of iron provided by his new friends, he lay in wait for the officer at the corner of the Calle of San Florencio, and gave him from behind a blow on the head which felled him senseless to the ground. Peña was then carried to his house, where he had to remain eight days in bed. His friends were powerless to persuade him to place the matter in the hands of the law; for being an irascible, impetuous man, he thought that legal proceedings would be too temperate for him. It was reported that the officer, when looking at the walls of the cemetery from his window, was heard to say in decided tones :

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"Poor Sinforoso ! It won't be many days before he takes his permanent place there."

These prophetic words caused a great sensation in the town, for the speaker was supposed to be imbued with the power of fulfilling them. The effect that they had on Sinforoso is indescribable. As soon as the officer had sufficiently recovered from his wound to reappear in the street, Perinolo's son made himself scarce ; he was not seen for quite a month. It was said that he only went out at night, and then with many precautions. But as everything must come to an end, the young man gradually relaxed his precautionary measures, as he thought that time must have tempered the murderous intents of Peña. He gradually grew accustomed to the danger, and ventured to go out in the daytime ; but he avoided the spots where he might meet his enemy by asking people he met if they had seen him go by, and in what direction had he gone. The town, therefore, was in a state of great excitement, as it daily expected that a catastrophe would ensue.

On a certain afternoon, hearing that Peña had gone to the mouth of the river with Don Rosendo, our Sinforoso ventured to enter the Café Marina and call for a bottle of beer.

Having taken a seat at one of the tables nearest the door, he noticed that many of his friends and acquaintances exchanged smiles and knowing glances ; and before many minutes had passed the stentorian voice of the officer fell upon his ear, for he was carrying on a discussion with his friends in a dark corner of the café. This sound made our journalist throw himself on all fours, and, gaining the door in this ignominious position, he quickly took to his heels.

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When he was supposed to be well out of reach, one of the party said :

“Alvaro, do you know who was here just now ?”

“Who ?”

“Sinforoso ; he has only just gone.”

“Ah ! bad luck to him !” exclaimed Peña, rushing more than running past the tables, and leaving the place in a whirlwind. But where was Sinforoso ? After flying a good way down the street without knowing whither, the officer was obliged to return to the café, mad with anger and rage. Nevertheless, so much time elapsed without his coming across his assailant that his anger cooled down, and when three months later he met him at the end of the pier he contented himself with the administration of a couple of kicks, and the son of Perinolo thanked his stars for getting off so easily. The indignation aroused by the upstart journal was tempered with the hope of annihilating “the reptiles” who had started it, or at least humiliating them with the reported grandeur of the duke. During the days succeeding the arrival of the grandee, Belinchon’s friends cast mocking glances at their rivals.

“Tremble, pettifoggers, tremble,” their glances seemed to say. Even Don Rosendo, so magnanimous, so philosophical, so humane, shared their implacable rage and longed to exterminate his rivals.

The combative spirit which had taken possession of him gradually gained ground, so much so that all his high-minded desire for progress and his interest in the moral and material evolution of his natal town were swallowed up in his burning desire to injure his enemies. This, however, was only an incidental state of affairs. The depths of his soul remained as pure

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and as progressive as when it left the hands of its Creator.

The Club party formed an impassable barrier around the duke, and according to the expression of "The Youth of Sarrio," it "sequestered" him.

He never went into the street without being accompanied by four or six of the most important members. Opportunities of approaching him nearer were only afforded to such of the townsfolk as were considered worthy of the honor, for parties and dances were given in the town and in the suburbs, and Belinchon's friends were not remiss in arranging picnics and fishing and hunting expeditions.

Really, life was pleasant in Sarrio in summer-time. The duke, whose coming had been heralded by the arrival of a quantity of luggage, was supplied with all necessary materials for painting, and, profiting by the leisure hours at his command, he produced pictures full of marvellous inspiration. His intercourse with the Belinchon family was of a stiff and courteous character, perfectly befitting the maintenance of a requisite distance. His words and his manners were always touched with an assumed protecting air, which somewhat softened the look of boredom on his face when in repose.

It was only with Venturita that his dull eyes seemed to brighten a little, and with her the duke's attention even increased to the point of a free-and-easy gallantry. When chatting in the family circle his glance was always turned in her direction, as if she were the only one capable of understanding him. Gonzalo's wife was the first allowed to see the creations of his brush, and her admiration was the only person's he valued; he gave her some French novels to read, and the discus-

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sions on the subjects and authors of these works formed topics of conversation between them at table, to which the others listened without understanding. After some days the duke suggested painting Venturita's portrait. He said that landscape was his chief taste, he had painted portraits only of the Duchesse de Montmorency and of one of the infantas of Spain ; but now he had a great fancy to paint Venturita just as he had seen her for the first time in the low-necked blue dress. The young girl felt immensely flattered : the first portrait a duchess, the second an infanta, the third herself ! Then that particular wish of painting her in the dress worn the first evening ! No doubt she had made a great impression upon the duke. The sittings were started in one of the rooms on the ground floor. Don Jaime, as the grandee was called, decided to paint her reclining on a crimson sofa, with plants and flowers at her side. Doña Paula, Gonzalo, and Cecilia were present at the first sitting, but they soon wearied of being there, and during the subsequent sittings they were alone, the mother only occasionally coming in to give a glance at the picture and to say a few polite words.

During the fortnight that the painting of the portrait lasted, the intimacy between the duke and the beauty made great strides. The grandee even condescended to tell her a great deal of his private history ; his public one was known by everybody. Don Jaime de la Nava and Sandoval married, when very young, a grand lady united by ties of blood to the sovereign. The marriage did not prove happy. The passionate love of the lady, which had led her to overstep the social barrier which separated her from her husband, soon cooled down ; differences arose, a scandal took

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place, and a separation ensued. Although Don Jaime descanted on the privileges and honors of his elevated position, he did not make it all *couleur de rose*, for no, he was a victim to fate, and only custom made him callous to the sufferings to which he was a prey. He had not had time to recover from the shock of his wife's treatment, but he found some consolation in making bitter attacks upon the aristocracy of Madrid, and the highest people of the land were not exempted from the venom of his remarks. Venturita had thus an opportunity of gaining an insight into the character of the magnate, and as the duke grew more at home with her he took the measure of the girl's character. He would turn the conversation to other topics, as if he felt it was not good form to pursue depressing subjects; and he talked with perfect naturalness of the immoral conduct of high-born ladies in Madrid as if it were a matter of daily occurrence. The Duquesa de So-and-So is now with a certain banker's son; the Marquesa de So-and-So has gone off to Brussels with the son of the Russian ambassador; this lady takes up with toreadors, that one with her groom; the Condesa de So-and-So is proud of having three lovers at a time; the Baronessa de So-and-So had hers in the carriage with her, whilst her husband drove on the box.

In fact, there was not a lady of the court at whom he did not cast some aspersion, not excepting his wife herself. Once he concluded his discourse by saying: "And finally, if you want to know what the aristocracy of Madrid is like, you have only to take the Duchess de Tornos, who is a conglomeration of all its vices."

Ventura was amazed. She had a vague idea of the duke's bad feeling towards the duchess, but she had

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not thought it possible that a husband could speak like that of his wife under any circumstances.

Nevertheless, she was so fascinated by the importance of the grandee that she soon began to think that his cynicism and style of conversation were only according to fashion and "good form."

Then spicy anecdotes followed of a most questionable character, but they were told in the soft, low voice of the duke, and his lips were wreathed with a smile of superiority as he said :

"One can tell you these things, as you are married."

It was thus that the young girl gained a panoramic view of the court world, which she had been so anxious to know. The private life of those pallid youths with waxed *mostachos* she had seen driving smart vehicles in the Castellana, and of those beautiful, proud ladies rolling by in their carriages, scarcely deigning to cast a careless, scornful glance at her, now passed before her mind's eye. Whilst only affecting a polite attention to these details of the world, she was in reality drinking them in with feverish eagerness, for she had always a nascent desire for brilliant society, extravagant fancies, and unattainable ambitions.

Thus the Duke de Tornos, inadvertently, and for the mere pleasure of indulging his blasé, wounded state of mind, did more for the corruption of the young wife's soul in a few days than could have been done by a whole course of novels.

Because, after all, what the novels say is not true ; but the stories of the duke had only recently taken place, and the people who had played a part in them were really living persons known by their world ; in fact, to use a common expression, it was real life.

The grandee with his corrupt mind and worn-out

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body, and the beautiful country girl anxious to fly to other spheres, doubtless both thought they had been born to understand each other and to be drawn together like certain forces in natural science. Venturita centred all her powers of imagination upon the painter, and she became more fascinating every day. When the duke, raising his eyelids to look at her, evinced any sign of admiration, her delight suffused her cheeks with crimson, and she was filled with the deepest scorn for the state of life in which fate had cast her lot.

Although she did not presume upon the friendliness of the grandee, she ventured to joke with him a little occasionally, to the great distress of Don Rosendo ; in fact, she knew she was the favorite, and so she assumed a coquettish manner in his company. The duke meanwhile, in spite of his assumed indifference for all things in heaven or earth, devoted an immense deal of attention to his coat, shirts, ties, and, in short, all that constitutes man's attire ; and the variety, originality, and eccentricity of the costumes in which he appeared were a revelation to Venturita and a source of wonder to the town. In fact, if she dressed herself for the duke, he did so no less for her.

It gradually dawned upon Don Rosendo's younger daughter that the friendship of the grandee might be turned to account by augmenting her father's political influence in the town, as well as by adding lustre and dignity to the family.

For instance, he might have a large cross. . . .

Those who had one were addressed as "excellency." If her father were an excellency he would lose the stamp of a codfish merchant, which was an offence to her. And why should it not come to pass ? A person of such influence as the duke could easily manage it.

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She had heard that a title of count or marquis could be bought. A title ! And Venturita, without thinking of her elder brother and sister, lost herself in pleasant thoughts of one day being addressed as "la señora marquesa," or "la señora condesa."

But then that husband of hers was such a "boor" ! So adverse to interfering with politics or asserting himself at all. Oh ! if she were but a man, what would she not do !

In a short time her friendship and influence with the duke increased to such a degree that it was noticed not only by the inmates of the house, but also by outsiders. Don Jaime even went to meet her when coming from bathing, and walked back with her right across the town, to the great excitement of the people. The girl nearly died with pleasure at the thought of the envy of her friends at this mark of favor, for the duke openly paid her a thousand attentions, and made no secret of admiring her more than the other members of the family. Gonzalo was secretly very annoyed at this friendliness. He had disliked the duke from the first, and he noticed that the antipathy was mutual, although, as a man of the world, the duke had assumed a courteous, almost kind demeanor, which would have disguised his feelings to any but a very keen observer, or a simple-hearted fellow like Gonzalo. Nevertheless, with his increased friendliness and ease with the wife there was a decrease of animosity towards the husband, and his politeness seemed to be of a sincere character. Knowing that Gonzalo was devoted to sport, he made him a present of a magnificent gun which had been given him by the Czar of Russia. Then the grandee frequently invited him to join him in shooting expeditions, so that their relations became less strained.

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But unfortunately an accident occurred which upset them again.

One day, Gonzalo having gone to Lancia on business for his father-in-law, the duke went off coursing, only accompanied by Don Feliciano and Don Sanjurjo, the notary, and the dogs that he took with him belonged to the house. Then it happened that the harrier Gonzalo thought most of, having bought him for a high price in England, misbehaved himself. The fault that he committed was one of the gravest that can be committed in the exercise of his duty, it was nothing less than dropping a hare when the duke ran forward to take it from his mouth, so that the timid creature, only wounded in one leg, escaped into the bracken. Thereupon the rage of the grandee was so great that, raising his gun, he fired upon the dog, but the animal, seeing the aggressive attitude of the sportsman, ran away and got off scot free.

The duke, in a fury, pursued the animal to put an end to it, but he could not overtake it. The culprit fled from the scene, and was invisible for the rest of the day. When the grandee reached home he was told that the dog had returned, and then Don Jaime, who was still in a rage, said to the servant :

“Catch that dog, take him out of the town, and shoot him.”

The man-servant was thunderstruck. He stood for some minutes in doubt, and then, cowed by the stern, imperious look of the duke, he bowed submissively and proceeded to execute the order.

He called the dog, put a chain on him, and taking his gun he left the house. How little the poor creature thought he was going to his death ! He leapt for joy ; he wriggled with delight, and lavished such licks of

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affection on the servant's face that the man's eyes filled with tears, and he cursed the course of action to which he was compelled, for the beautiful dog was a great favorite of his.

"Heaven's mercy on us! What should he say to Señor Gonzalo when he heard that his Polion had been killed?"

Just as he was thinking this, Gonzalo appeared round the corner of the street. He had arrived in the coach from Lancia, and was on his way home. Seeing the servant, he said with some surprise:

"Where are you off to, Ramon?"

The servant, abashed and frightened, hesitated a few seconds, and then said:

"To kill the dog."

This reply so astonished the young man that he was dumb with amazement.

"Kill the dog!"

"Yes, señor; the duke gave me the order because he dropped the hare after catching it."

Gonzalo turned livid.

"How dare he give such a shameless order!" roared the young man, and snatching the chain so roughly from the servant that he made him stagger. Then he strode towards the house, accompanied by the dog, with the intention of having a violent scene with the duke. But before he reached home he had time to consider that it would be a breach of hospitality to quarrel with a guest, and so he contented himself with sending Polion back to the kennel, and treating the duke somewhat coldly.

The antipathy which had been momentarily overcome now revived with double force. The preference shown by the duke for his wife and the attentions that he paid

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her now became as offensive to him as they were at first astonishing, although it still never entered his head that they went beyond the politeness or gallantry customary in high society. Besides, the disparity of age between the duke and his wife seemed to preclude all thoughts of jealousy. Such things only happened in novels. One day, when he was alone with Cecilia, he suddenly broached the subject by saying :

"I say, Cecilia, what do you think of the friendship of my wife with the duke?"

The girl looked surprised.

"What do I think of it?" she returned, looking at him with her large, liquid eyes. "Why, I think that Ventura gets on with him better than the rest of us here."

"But this partiality, don't you think it makes me look rather ridiculous?"

"Why?"

"Why, because it does," was the abrupt reply.

Then after a few minutes' silence he added :

"You, Cecilia, do not know how easily a husband can be made ridiculous when he has such a frivolous, imprudent wife as Ventura!"

"Gonzalo!"

"So imprudent, yes; for you don't notice how pleased she is to talk aside with him, and how delighted she is when everybody sees her hanging on his arm! There is no need to say anything, for I know it is sheer vanity. She has never been anything but vain and frivolous. You know it yourself, although you won't confess it. But in this case her vanity may give rise to many grave consequences for me and for everybody. Let her put on a different dress every day to attract the duke; let her cut her nails into points, and let her

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put rouge on her cheeks ; let her talk of Meissonier's pictures without having seen them, and play the fool in other similar ways ; but, my dear girl, those smiles before people and those asides are intolerable, and if they go on many more days I think I shall have to put matters right in a way she won't like."

Cecilia tried to calm him down. If he himself confessed that it was all due to Venturita's frivolous nature, why should he excite himself about it ? Jealousy was ridiculous ; nobody in the world could suppose that Venturita regarded the duke as anything else than what he was—a married man, and an old one who might very well be her grandfather.

"No, I am not jealous," said the young man somewhat shamefacedly.

"Yes, you are, Gonzalo, although you don't know that you are. This anger and this excitement, what do they show but jealousy ? And look here, my boy ; allow me to say that it is not paying much compliment to yourself, and still less to your wife, for if you can imagine that Ventura can prefer this worn-out man to yourself, you credit her with very little taste."

She blushed as she said these words, and Gonzalo received the sally with a smile without being convinced. His instinct, which was stronger than his intelligence, told him that such an aberration was possible. However, he did not wish to pursue the discussion, because it was humiliating to press the point, even with his sister-in-law.

He wanted to tell his wife that he strongly objected to the conversations, confidences, glances, and coquettish smiles she lavished upon the duke, but he knew Venturita of old, and dreaded speaking to her himself. One of the biting remarks in which she excelled, or a mock-

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ing retort, easily upset him, and when he was upset like that he did not know where he was and where to stop.

This was the position of affairs when, the day following his conversation with Cecilia, he looked in at the Club as usual. Glancing at the papers on the centre table, his eye fell upon the last number of "The Youth of Sarrio." He hardly ever read the paper, for although he was not a party to the antagonistic attitude of his fellow-members, he was equally averse to the course taken by the Cabin community, and he avoided seeing the insults levelled at his father-in-law, that made his blood boil. But on this occasion he cast a careless glance at it, and stopped to read some of Periquito's verses on the charms of a certain lady, which made him roar with laughter. Under this effusion there was a short story with the heading: "*An uncommon kind of husband*," and he began to peruse it in a perfunctory way:

"A mandarin on his travels was received as the guest of a certain Chinese plebeian, who placed the best room at his disposal and provided the best provisions the market could supply in his honor. This Chinaman had a very beautiful wife who at once attracted the attention of the old mandarin (for he was old). The mandarin took no heed of the comforts and the luxurious furniture which the Chinese proudly placed at his disposal; he had only eyes for the wife of the Chinaman. The house was frequented by all the friends of the host, who were obsequiously effusive in smiles, flattery, and genuflections. But the mandarin hardly condescended to notice them; he had no words for anybody but the wife of the Chinaman. He was taken to see the town, the chief points of interest, the picturesque suburbs; it all fell flat: the mandarin was absorbed in

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the lady. He was taken to large shooting parties, he was rowed out on the still blue sea in a beautiful boat, to try his hand at fishing. But as the mandarin cast his net into the deep he thought he would rather ensnare his host's lovely wife.

"And whilst the whole house and neighborhood were alive to the cause of the mandarin's depression and saw the drift of his attentions, the husband was quite unsuspecting and calm, and continued to entertain the mandarin with magnificent banquets and splendid festivities until a friend whispered in his ear one day: 'Don't you see, silly, that your guest cares nothing for your entertainments and fishing and shooting parties? His heart is set upon your beautiful wife.'

"Then the Chinaman, when his eyes were opened, took his wife by the hand and led her to the mandarin, saying:

"'Pardon, my lord, but I did not notice your depression, nor did I guess your wishes. If I had guessed them sooner I would have gratified them ere now. Here, take my wife, O glorious mandarin.'"

Gonzalo read the columns without seeing the drift of their meaning, but suddenly it burst upon him, like a flash of lightning, that he was the subject of the little story. A sudden rush of blood suffused his face with a fiery hue. He looked around in a quick, shamefaced way. He was alone. Then with convulsive hands he took up the paper he had let fall and re-read the article for the second, third, and fourth time. The more he read it the more the fearful suspicion took form in his mind, and it so overwhelmed him, mentally and physically, that his whole body, with the exception of his head, grew suddenly icy cold.

The first idea that came to him with returning self-

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possession was, "I'll go at once to the office of 'The Youth' and reduce them all to fragments."

He put on his hat and left the room, but on the staircase another side of the picture presented itself to him—the great scandal and commotion he would cause in the town, the laughing-stock he would be in the place, and how his enemies, or rather those of his father-in-law, would delight in turning upon him.

He remounted the staircase and returned to the Club to think a minute. After taking two or three turns up and down the room without knowing if he were moving or motionless, he altered his mind.

He took the paper, folded it deliberately, put it in his pocket, then went slowly down the iron staircase, and turned homeward with a slow step, pale face, and stony glance.

His sense of strength and rage had restored his self-possession.

"Is the señorita in her room?" he asked the servant who opened the door.

"I think so, señor; I will ask the maid."

"No, no; don't ask anybody; I will go myself."

And he went up to the room which they had had since the duke had occupied the first floor. On passing from the passage he did not notice Doña Paula, who was sitting near the door, and who was aghast at his strange expression of countenance. Venturita was standing before the mirror. On seeing her husband she said, without turning her head:

"Hollo! I thought you had gone out. What is up now?"

Gonzalo drew the paper from his pocket, unfolded it slowly, and handed it to her, saying:

"This."

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"And what is this?" asked the girl in surprise.

"A paper."

"Yes, I see—but what of it?"

"It contains a very interesting little story. Read it. Here in the third column, underneath these verses."

There were three or four pots of flowers in the room, which had been used for the portrait that was standing against the wall, waiting to be hung up in the drawing-room. Gonzalo's eyes grew dark as they fell upon this picture of his wife, redder than a rose and more golden than a canary, and with a mystic expression on her face such as he had never seen.

The duke had talked of sending the portrait to the Salon in Paris. Whilst Ventura read the paper he kept his eyes fixed upon her face with breathless attention, but she did not waver under his gaze; she only grew a little pale as she read the last lines and returned him the paper.

"Why did you ask me to read that? I don't understand."

"Well, I will explain it to you," returned Gonzalo, accentuating each syllable in suppressed rage. "I asked you to read this because the mandarin mentioned in it is the Duke of Tornos, you are the Chinese lady, and I am the Chinaman—do you understand now?"

At these words he glared at his wife in a terrible way, and crushed up in his hand a bough of a plant that was standing beside him.

Ventura met the look without wincing, and seemed more surprised than alarmed; she hesitated for an instant, whilst her lips moved to reply, and she ended by bursting into a loud laugh.

"*Ave Maria!* what an atrocity!"

"I am in earnest, Ventura," returned the young

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man ; "this that excites your derision is a very serious matter, and your happiness and mine are at stake."

Ventura only replied by another peal of laughter, and another, until she bubbled over with laughter, but Gonzalo was not blind to the affectation of her merriment.

"Take care, Ventura, take care," he said with his face fraught with fury ; "recollect I am speaking seriously now."

"But my dear fellow—ha ! ha !—do you expect me not to laugh when you tell me—ha ! ha !—that you are a Chinaman and I am a Chinese lady?—ha ! ha ! ha !" and her laughter grew more affected every minute.

"It is now some days since I ought to have put matters straight," continued the husband gloomily, after a pause. "This unwarranted, inconvenient, stupid, familiar attitude that you take with the duke before people irritated me exceedingly—but I wasn't going to expose myself to ridicule by saying so. Jealous men always look ridiculous—but you see what has happened by my being too remiss."

So saying, he broke off the branch he was clutching and crushed it in his hand.

"But you are really jealous now, are you not?" she asked in tones of mingled cajolery and endearment.

"If I were, I should be silent, Ventura—I should be silent and watchful ; and if my jealousy were well grounded—I learnt what to do before the curé read me Saint Paul's epistles. But there is no question of jealousy here ; the age and position of the duke preclude it, and I don't insult you by supposing you prefer him to me. The point is, the ridicule which your imprudence has brought upon me. You don't see, you stupid girl,

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that we have the eye of the public upon us ; that we have lots of enemies, and that they seize the smallest pretext to attack us."

"Well, you acknowledge it is only a pretext to annoy you."

"Yes ; but it is founded on your inherent vanity, which I have never been able to break you of."

"Let us understand each other, Gonzalo. What have I done ?" she asked in an injured tone.

The young man was silent as he looked at her sternly. Then after some minutes he said slowly :

"You know too well. Repeating it degrades me."

There was another pause of silence, and then Ventura said somewhat impatiently :

"Well, what do you want ?"

"I am going to tell you," returned the young man, restraining himself with difficulty. "I want this objectionable friendship to cease, as you see it is most derogatory to me. I want you not to think any more of the Duke de Tornos, nor to take any notice of his suave smile nor of his generally compromising flirting manners. I want to resume the calm tenor of our lives, such as it was before his arrival ; and as that is my wish, I intend to have it done at all costs."

He was silent for a minute, and then with a vehemence beyond what the occasion required, he added :

"This very day the duke shall leave the house."

Ventura looked at him in amazement. She turned suddenly livid, and with her lips trembling with rage she exclaimed :

"What do you mean ? You will have to be taken to Leganes. Come, come," she added in a more conciliatory tone, "do me the kindness to leave me in peace, and go and calm yourself, for you really require it."

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Gonzalo's face then became distorted with fury, his lips wreathed with fierce sarcasm, and his eyes flamed.

"Ah!" he roared, more than said, "take the friendship of this rake, for he is a rake, and all Spain knows it; you think more of it than of your husband's happiness; but don't think for an instant that because I am not a duke and a grandee that I don't know how to protect my honor! Look here! Look here! This is the respect that I have for the duke."

And at these words he gave the picture a kick which levelled it to the ground with a great noise. Then he seized hold of it, with his teeth set, his eyes blood-shot, and a prey to one of those paroxysms of rage to which powerful phlegmatic people are sometimes subject. The canvas was soon in pieces; and Ventura, utterly dumfounded, but with the daring of a spoilt woman, gasped out:

"Brute! Brute!"

The tone of this insult was so fierce with rage that Gonzalo raised his head as if he had been struck with a red-hot iron; and springing upon her, he seized her by the arm. The girl uttered a cry of agony, her husband's hand held her with a steel-like grip that went to the very bone.

"Forgive her, Gonzalo, forgive her!" exclaimed Doña Paula, intervening.

The infuriated man turned his head without loosening his hold of his wife. At the sight of his mother-in-law, in whose face, now convulsed with terror, illness had made such cruel ravages, gazing at him with imploring eyes and hands clasped in entreaty, his hand let go of Ventura and fell to his side.

He had no time to say anything. Doña Paula,

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without looking at her daughter, dragged him by the coat-sleeve, saying :

“Come, my son, come ; I will settle this matter, and calm you down.”

And Gonzalo, overwhelmed with shame, let himself be taken away like an automaton. On reaching her room the good lady locked the door.

“I heard all,” she said, as she fixed upon him her large, dark eyes, as sad as those of a Dolorosa, the last remnant of her beauty. “I saw you cross the passage, looking so strange that I couldn’t help following you. I don’t know what it says in this paper that you have given Venturita, but it must be something very repulsive and objectionable.”

“The greatest insult that a man can have !” returned Gonzalo in a stifled tone.

“How infamous ! Insult you, who have never hurt them ! You are right. It is Ventura’s fault : her frivolity and the silly ideas that she gets into her head have caused this trouble, as they have caused other slighter ones that you have had. But do not imagine for an instant that there is anything bad about Ventura. She is a giddy creature, a little flirt, but she is not bad at heart ; she will improve with time. I, also, have had my share of pride, and committed fooleries that put me to shame to think of now ! Oh, years, sadness, and sickness take all the nonsense out of one ! The thing now is to prevent any worse consequences. I have noticed for some time the duke’s attentions, and the intimacy which has sprung up between them. I know quite well that there is nothing in it ; I am as certain of my daughter as you must be ; but I can quite understand that the conduct of this man is annoying to you. Moreover, when a paper takes the

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opportunity of insulting you, it is time matters were put on another footing ; some step must be taken."

"It is come to this," said Gonzalo moodily, "I send the duke out of the house this very day."

"No, you cannot and must not do so ; you are quick-tempered, and there would be a violent scene, which must be avoided."

"But it is precisely this scene that I want !"

"Don't be childish, Gonzalo," replied the lady. "It is for me to settle this matter, because Rosendo neither sees, hears, nor understands anything beyond politics. A scandal just now would make you ridiculous."

"Never mind !" exclaimed the young man in a rage. "I want the pleasure of kicking him out of the house."

"You force me to say, then, Gonzalo," returned Doña Paula in a tone of impatience tinged with authority, "that you have no right to do so. It was not you who invited him, neither are you the master of the house."

The young man colored deeply ; and noting his confusion the lady added in an affectionate tone :

"You are our son, and sons do not interfere in the affairs of their parents. It is they who have the duty of watching over their happiness and sacrificing themselves for it. I will see that the duke leaves the house without any scandal, and without any one suspecting the reason, or your doing anything which you would regret afterwards. . . . Don't think that I do it for his sake, for I detest him. From the moment the man arrived he filled me with the greatest repulsion. Now that I see what he has brought upon our family, you can imagine how I dislike him. I only do it for your sake, because I love you, I will not say any more than my daughter—because one's children, oh ! one's

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children ! you know what they are—but, at least as much, and I esteem you much higher."

Gonzalo, quite overcome, dropped into a chair, and began sobbing like a child, with his face in his hands. The good lady placed her thin, white hand on his head, and with tears in her eyes, she said :

"My poor boy ! Wait a minute, I am going to see this señor about the matter."

The Señora de Belinchon then descended the iron staircase leading to the second floor, and meeting the grandee's valet, she asked :

"What is the señor duke doing?"

"He is painting," replied the servant, looking with surprise and astonishment at Doña Paula's red eyes.

"Tell him that I wish to speak to him."

Whilst the man went to inform his master, Doña Paula thought her strength would give way, for she began to feel premonitory symptoms of the spasms to which she was occasionally subject ; but her strong wish to restore peace to her children overcame her weakness at the moment. Commending herself to our Lady of Pity, she entered Don Jaime's study, full of resolution.

The señor, clad in the fantastic garb worn at home in the morning, came forward to receive her with his palette and brushes in his hand.

"Señora," he said, bowing respectfully and raising the gold-tasselled Turkish cap that covered his head, "I am sorry you troubled to come up. A message would have summoned me immediately to your presence."

Doña Paula made a gesture of thanks, putting her hand to her heart, which was beating at her side like a sledge-hammer. The duke looked at her in surprise.

"Take a seat, señora," he said, putting his palette and brushes on a chair.

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Whereupon the lady dropped into an arm-chair, and Don Jaime remained standing.

"The door must be shut," she said, beginning to rise from her seat; but the gentleman anticipated her, and then took up his stand in front of the lady, squaring his feet with exaggerated respect, and waiting for her to speak.

Several minutes passed in silence, then raising her sad eyes, she said:

"Señor duke, you have conferred a great honor on us in coming to our house. We can never sufficiently thank you for this mark of favor——"

The duke bowed as he raised his heavy eyelids to cast upon his interlocutor a look tinged with curiosity.

"Why do you not sit down?" asked Doña Paula, interrupting her speech.

"I am very comfortable, señora; continue."

But the interruption had upset her; she could not proceed for some minutes. Finally she murmured:

"It is dreadful!—you do not know, señor duke, what I am going through now. I wish I were dead!"

And the tears rushing to her eyes, she drew her handkerchief from her pocket and buried her face in it.

The duke, now quite astonished, said:

"Calm yourself, señora. I am a true friend of both you and de Belinchon. Whatever trouble you may have, let me share it as if it were mine, and I will do what I can to assuage it."

"Many thanks, many thanks," murmured the lady, without taking her handkerchief from her eyes; and after a minute's silence she said in a trembling voice:

"Will you do me a very great favor? A favor for which I will thank you all the days of my life—but I don't dare ask it."

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"I repeat that I am at your service ; and that anything I can do for you, you may consider done."

"Oh ! no, it is outrageous in me ! You would never think, señor duke, that your visit to this house has caused much misery. Your attention and your admiration of my daughter Ventura's frank, merry disposition have given rise to remarks in the town."

"Oh !" interrupted the duke, smiling to hide a certain feeling of shame.

"Yes, very offensive remarks about all of us; more especially about my son-in-law, who is as dear to us as if he were our own son. I do not blame you or her. I am sure that in your case it has only been due to over-attention, which, in a little place like this, where nothing escapes notice— Perhaps you, señor, ought not to have— She has been imprudent and frivolous, she was always faulty in that way— She is a girl with a will of her own, as one may say— If there were no divisions in the town there would not be this fearful feud, which is nearly the death of us; probably nobody would have noticed— Unfortunately our enemies seize on the most trifling pretext to annoy us and put us to shame— An article has come out which attacks my son-in-law in such a shameless way— And this I cannot allow——"

Dofia Paula's courtesy had diminished with her speech, and the final words were rapped out defiantly. A slight flush suffused the duke's affrighted face. He ought, of course, to have seen the gravity of the situation, but he merely thought : "This person is reading me a lesson."

"I am very sorry," he said in an obsequious tone, "to have caused you all any trouble. But I am so used to being an object of public comment and attack

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that the remarks and articles you have just mentioned don't annoy me in the slightest. The lower classes always try to pay off the superiority of the upper ones by finding fault with them. It is the eternal law of give and take that cannot be altered."

"That is all very well, señor duke, for such an exalted personage as yourself— But we are quite different; we are not in such a high position, and evil tongues, you must know, can do us a lot of harm," returned Doña Paula, so simply that it sounded ironical.

The duke, somewhat irritated, played nervously with the tassel of the cap he held in his hand, as he said :

"I repeat, I am very sorry, señora. If I had thought that my innocent attentions to your daughter could have been subjected to such malignant interpretation, I would have been more careful in proffering them— In the future I will be more discreet. *Dio mio!*" he added, smiling. "How is it possible to imagine that a man of my years could regard a child like Ventura in any but a paternal way!"

This remark was supposed to completely exculpate him.

"Oh, señor duke, men in your position are never old. The brilliancy of it is attractive to women— Therefore, it is not sufficient to be merely more prudent in the future; the world must be robbed of all pretext for remarks——"

The duke turned suddenly pale, hesitated a few seconds, and finally said :

"By my leaving the house, eh?"

"This was the favor I came to beg of you," she said without raising her eyes, and in a tone of humility.

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Don Jaime turned a shade paler, took a turn up and down the room, crushing the Turkish cap in his clenched hand, uttered a sarcastic laugh, and returning to his place in front of Doña Paula, he said with mocking arrogance :

“So you turn me out of the house, señora ?”

“I, señor duke ? What an idea ! The only thing I want is to restore peace to my children and avoid a catastrophe.”

“What catastrophe ?” asked the duke, whilst an ominous light shone in his dull eyes.

Doña Paula saw it boded danger for her son-in-law, so she hastened to repair her slip.

“The catastrophe of my son-in-law being insulted by those wretches— Look here, señor, if you are offended at the request I have just made you make a great mistake— We are so honored at your coming to our house that nothing could have flattered us so much as this favor— My husband exerted himself to prefer the request, and he was delighted when he heard that you accepted the invitation. . . . You can never understand how proud I was to have such a distinguished person in my house— I, a woman of the people, the daughter of a sailor, the granddaughter of a watchman, known in the place as the Serena, as my mother and grandmother were before me—certainly I should have been prouder still if it had been some years ago—one’s pride decreases with disillusion and troubles. But at all events I am very flattered, and only the fear of the great troubles which may accrue to my children obliges me to take this step ; so you will forgive me, señor.”

Don Jaime took another turn across the room, stopped in the centre to think a minute, and ended

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by shrugging his shoulders and wreathing his lips in a scornful way. Then advancing towards Doña Paula, he said :

“Is your husband aware of the step you have just taken ?”

“No, señor ; and I shall be glad if it could be settled without his knowledge.”

“Perfectly. It shall be done to-day.”

“Oh ! señor duke ! a thousand thanks— You will forgive—” she exclaimed, rising from her seat and extending her hands to him.

The grandee bowed low without replying.

“I entreat you not to bear me malice.”

“The subject of our conversation will remain quite *entre nous*. We will manage to avoid disclosing the reason of my departure. Try to play your part well. I will answer for my own.”

Doña Paula quitted the room, escorted by the duke, who led her to the door with an exaggerated, silent politeness.

On reaching the staircase the anxious lady, once more alone, breathed freely. Although it had been at the cost of so many painful emotions, she was delighted at having arranged the matter without any scandal or danger. And with a fleet foot, she who generally dragged herself about in ill-health now ran to Gonzalo to tell him the result of her mission.

At luncheon the duke mentioned that he had received a letter from one of his sons, saying he was coming to spend the month of September with him in Sarrio ; and his brother, the Marques del Riego, would probably also come. He had therefore decided to take rooms at the hotel. Don Rosendo, seconded by his wife, immediately strongly opposed the step, whilst Gonzalo,

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with gloomy face and lowered eyes, continued his meal in silence during the discussion.

In spite of all Don Rosendo's arguments to make him stay, even representing that the house was large enough to receive the new guests, the sorrow which his whole family would feel at this unexpected departure, etc., etc., the duke was obdurate, although he responded with his usual patronizing smile, and a flow of pleasant, friendly phrases. At last it was seen that persuasion was useless, and the depressed Don Rosendo accompanied the duke and his secretary on the inspection of the rooms at the only decent hotel the town possessed. The first floor was taken, and on the following day the duke moved into it, in spite of his host's urgent entreaties that he would at least stay until the arrival of his relatives.

The whole place was taken by surprise at the move, and eagerly inquired the cause. But although Don Rosendo gave everybody a full account of the whole occurrence, it was impossible to prevent people suspecting that things had not been just as they were told by Belinchon. His enemies were particularly active in unravelling the mystery, thinking, not without reason, that the Club party would not have the duke's influence to oppose them. During the two months and more of the grandee's residence in Sarrio, the friends of Don Rosendo had successfully brought into court an indictment against the *alcalde*, the administrator of the posts, who was of the Cabin party, had been withdrawn, and the problem of the slaughter-house had been solved according to Belinchon's opinion.

Maza's friends, who had been going about like doomed flies in autumn, received the fresh news like a tardy ray of sunlight. *Santo Dios!* what excited talk took place

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that night in the Cabin ! Joy shone in all their eyes, their nostrils dilated with delight as they anticipated the fall of the Club party and a decisive, a grand victory for themselves. "The Youth of Sarrio" published in its next number the following laconic but venomous paragraph :

"His excellency, the Señor Duke of Tornos, who was the guest of Don Rosendo Belinchon, has moved to the first floor apartments of the Estella Hotel. We offer the honored duke our sincerest congratulations."

This disgraceful notice made Belinchon ill for days, and then he sent his seconds to Maza. But the *alcalde* returned that they could not fight whilst he was in office, but when that was over he would see if he could not cross swords with such a blusterer. Then the seconds replying in a similar tone, they were threatened with imprisonment and had to retire.

The Duke of Tornos continued visiting Don Rosendo's house occasionally, and Belinchon and his friends always accompanied him when he went out. The friendship between them remained outwardly the same. The small neutral party in Sarrio thought that there was no mystery in his move, and that it all originated in the ridiculous imaginations of the Cabin party, who were blinded by the desire to get the better of their adversaries. However, some days had elapsed, and September had come in without bringing the advent of either the grandee's son or brother. The duke himself had so much improved in health in Sarrio that he had his carriage and horses brought from Madrid, and bought a charming little fishing-boat. He seemed disposed to spend some months in Sarrio. In his exterior relations with the Belinchon family—that is to say, when he met them in the town—he assumed a courte-

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ous, kind manner befitting people deserving much attention. He did not take such a familiar tone with Venturita as before, but he chatted with her in the theatre and at the Promenade in a playful way. Thus those who pried into the reason of his leaving the house were put off the scent. Doña Paula was very pleased at this behavior, and Gonzalo even, seeing that he could not expect more, was courteous and polite to him.

Peace reigned again between the young couple. Venturita after a few days, during which she looked pale and cross, and exchanged no word with her husband, doubtless being hurt by the violence he had shown in the scene described, resumed her usual demeanor—merry and pleasant sometimes, cross and capricious at others, and always ready with a sharp, sarcastic remark. Nevertheless, Gonzalo noticed an unaccustomed amiability and deference in her manner, and he attributed it to her desire to blot out the recollection of that transient but perilous trouble they had undergone. So the days drifted quietly by in Don Rosendo's house, only disturbed by Doña Paula's attacks of illness. She was as often in bed as up, but she took long drives with Cecilia, or Ventura, and often had her grandchild Cecilita whom she worshipped, with her. Don Rufo talked of the necessity of her moving to another climate, to a place above the level of the sea, where the air would be clearer, and Don Rosendo, although possessed with the desire of exterminating his enemies and conferring happiness on his natal town, entertained the idea of moving, albeit with some repugnance, and amused himself by weaving vague grand utilitarian plans as usual. He was inspired with the happy notion of transferring "The Light of Sarrio" to

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Madrid, and making it a daily paper under the title of "The Light of the Provinces," to defend the moral and material interests of the provinces; to maintain their autonomic life independent and free in face of the monopolizing action and power of the capital, "a raging fire that dries up the sap of the nation and devours her inherited wealth." What a great and noble thought!

At the end of October Gonzalo went to Lancia on business for his father-in-law. It was a question of persuading a banker of the town not to proceed with certain negotiations with a capitalist in Sarrio, a certain member of the Cabin, according to report; anyhow, he was to let Don Rosendo have the refusal of the offer in question on the same terms.

Gonzalo had been away two days. At dusk on the afternoon of the third day Doña Paula thought she would go up and see Ventura, who had returned to the second floor after the duke's departure. The good lady very rarely ascended that iron staircase. But that day she felt stronger, she had less pain in her side, and she wanted to try her strength and prove to herself how much better she was. The immediate object of her visit was to take her little granddaughter, Cecilita, a doll which the maid had just finished dressing. The stairs seemed very high. When she was half-way up she stopped to take breath, and on reaching the landing she called as loudly as she could:

"Cecilita, my child, where are you?"

"Here, grandma, here," returned the child, coming out of her mother's room.

She was a little creature, not yet three years old, with sunny golden hair, and so spontaneous in her baby talk that her grandmother quite adored her.



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"What have you got for me, grandma? What have you got for me?" she asked, looking eagerly at Doña Paula, after having nearly knocked her over in the impetuous way she caught her by the legs.

"The doll, my child, with its new frock."

"No doll . . . the doll for Lalina. . . . I'se big . . . I want chocolate."

"I have no chocolate here, my darling," replied the grandmother, looking lovingly at the child.

"Mama has chocolates . . . come and give me one."

And the little girl dragged her grandmother by the dress to her mother's room. On entering it the child seemed surprised, and looked about everywhere, whilst Ventura came forward and embraced her mother affectionately.

"My goodness! what a surprise! whatever brought you here? . . . I don't know that it is good for you to come upstairs like this. . . . Do you feel all right?"

"I am not very tired. I think I am better. De-hand's pills seem to do me good."

"That's right. I am glad we have at last hit upon a medicine that does some good. . . . Won't you sit down?"

"Grandma, give me a chocolate," said the child, interrupting them.

"I haven't any, my dear. . . . Have you any caramels, Ventura?"

"No."

"Jaime has some, and he is here."

Venturita turned dreadfully pale.

"What Jaime, child?" asked Doña Paula.

"Nobody, nobody; some nonsense. Well, these pills

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suit you, then? Suppose Don Rufo heard of it. . . . Suppose he heard of it!" Ventura repeated in such a trembling voice and looking so confused that her mother gazed at her in astonishment.

"Jaime is here . . . he has chocolate; come and see, grandma."

Whereupon the child dragged Señora Paula by the dress, and the lady, vaguely apprehending something terrible, let herself be led without knowing what she was doing.

"Cecilia!" cried Ventura in a voice unlike that ever heard by her mother.

However, the child paid no heed, and went on dragging her grandmother towards the bedroom. But before they reached the door the Duke of Tornos appeared on the threshold.

At the sight of the sudden apparition Doña Paula stood rooted to the spot, with her face white and terrified and her eyes staring in amazement. Then she fell heavily to the floor, dragging the child with her.

The duke hastened to raise her, and then, obedient to an imperious gesture of Ventura, he laid her on the sofa and took his departure.

The cries of the girl soon brought up the servants and her sister. It was thought it was a faint brought on by over-fatigue. She was carried to her room, where, thanks to Cecilia's care, she recovered consciousness, but not her faculty of speech. The unhappy lady was powerless to articulate a word. Two days went by, and the efforts of both Don Rufo and another doctor who came from Lancia were powerless to restore action to the paralyzed tongue.

She generally lay with her eyes shut, whilst soft sighs escaped her lips; but when Venturita entered the room



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she opened her eyes, and fixed them on her with an expression full of anguish and reproach.

Two days later, and almost at the same hour in which the fatal scene had taken place, the unhappy lady expired, with her grief-stricken eyes still fixed on Ventura's face, even in the hour of death.

Important Steps

CHAPTER XVII

GONZALO AND CECILIA BOTH TAKE IMPORTANT STEPS

THE Belinchon family retired to Tejada to mourn their bereavement in seclusion for some time.

Dofia Paula was mourned, as she deserved to be, by her magnanimous husband, who, waiving his ideas of progress and reform, was not remiss in showing signs of grief and affection, which, in my opinion, in no wise detracted from his public dignity.

It was long before Cecilia ceased to mourn the loss of her mother, to whom she had been bound as much by ties of sympathy as of blood. She was more like Dofia Paula than any other of the children, although she had not been the favorite. Pablo, the pet, felt it as much as he was capable of feeling anything; but, according to report, in a few days he was seen at full trot on his last purchase in horseflesh, so he could not be said to mourn very deeply.

But it was particularly on Venturita that the sudden death had a sad and strange effect. She was so overcome that she was for some days in bed in a high fever. When she recovered she looked pale and sad, replied abstractedly when she was spoken to, and in spite of her husband's entreaties she rarely left her room. This grief, as great as it was unexpected, was a proof to Gonzalo of the truth of Cecilia and Dofia Paula's continual assertions that Venturita might be wild, capricious, and vain, but she had a good heart. This

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was a great alleviation to the sincere sorrow he felt at the death of his mother-in-law, for the final and maternal service she rendered him had put the seal to the affection with which her constant kindness had inspired him.

The Duke of Tornos returned to Madrid shortly after his friend's affliction.

From thence he corresponded with Don Rosendo, and frequently did him a good turn in the ceaseless feud that he maintained against his enemies of the Cabin.

These services were finally crowned by the large cross of Isabel the Catholic. The grandee forwarded with the diploma the Order set in brilliants worth not less than 20,000 reales.

Don Rosendo's gratitude and emotion on the receipt of the great mark of honor can be imagined. As nobody in Sarrio owned a large cross, he had to go to Lancia for a knight of the Order to complete the honor by decorating him with it.

And now that he was a knight, he who had professed a certain metaphysical scorn for all religious observances now joined in the procession of the parish, so as to carry a light, with the Order on his breast and the ribbon across his frock coat.

All this was gall and wormwood to Maza's party, and their spite thereat was let off not only at the Cabin, but in the periodical, in which the famous founder of "The Light of Sarrio" was made the subject of both comic and serious attacks.

In some of the fierce and caustic paragraphs one could almost see the bilious *alcalde*, pen in hand.

For the first time in his life Don Rosendo read the diatribes with no sensation beyond that of infinite

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scorn. When the apogee of society is reached, attacks from pigmies seem more curious than offensive. The event roused Venturita from her lethargic, gloomy state. One of her dreams had been realized, and she participated in the pride and glory of her father, even to appearing sometimes in the town, but, of course, always in the carriage.

She adopted a haughtier mien, and her languid, grand, ladylike air made all the ladies of the town nearly die of envy, although they avenged themselves for her contemptuous manners by calling her, in their hours of spleen, "The Codfish Princess."

The death of her mother, whom everybody had known "with the handkerchief tied behind," as they say, had contributed as much as the grand cross of her father to raise the social status of the family, or rather to make it aristocratic.

Venturita, with her scornful demeanor, her costly costumes, and the disdainful coolness with which she treated her acquaintances, effectually avenged the poor woman who had been made to undergo such a lifelong mortification at the hands of the ladies of Sarrio.

The winter passed away at Tejada—a winter unusually inclement. Sometimes it rained a great deal, which made it impossible to leave the house; at other times there was a severe frost; the sky was clear, but in the mornings the fields looked white with a coating of frost half an inch thick. All these meteorological phenomena hold charms for those who love the country. Gonzalo was born to revel in these fluctuations of Nature. If it froze, he rose early in the morning and, to the astonishment of the household, he went out into the corridor, where he washed himself with the water which he had brought from the marble fountain

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basin after breaking the ice. Then donning a light shooting suit, he took his gun and went off on one of his wonderfully long walks of sixteen or eighteen miles, without any one hearing him complain of fatigue afterwards.

If it snowed, he put on his waterproof, his high boots, and his fur cap, and went shooting wild pigeons or hares about the estate. More than once he fell into one of the reservoirs filled with snow, and it was only through his extraordinary strength that he managed to get out. And then the country offered other pleasures unknown in town. The groups of trees and bushes were pleasant to the eye; the dark green of the conifera looked clear and bright with the collection of water on their branches, which the frost soon solidified; the leaves of the magnolias shone like crystals, and both the face and coloring of Nature were incessant in their changes, and the forms of the trees and the mountains were also subject to endless variations.

Even the monotonous pattering of the rain upon the foliage gave a pleasant, reposeful feeling quite luxurious to those who had nothing to do out of doors, and who had within all the comforts and luxuries of the rich. It was pleasant to hear the *pío pío* of the frightened sparrows, who resorted by hundreds to a large Washingtonia near the house as if it were a great aviary. It was amusing to Gonzalo to feed the little exotic creatures that Don Rosendo had on his property after walking over to the cages in sabots, and it was also delightful to doze in an arm-chair by the fireside with a cigar in his mouth and a bottle of rum by his side, whilst Cecilia read aloud either an interesting story or some harmonious, sonorous poetry.

Don Rosendo and Pablo went regularly every day to

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Sarrio, and came back to dinner. Don Rosendo occupied himself in directing public opinion along the path of progress, both moral and material, and in crushing those "reptiles who grovel in the mud because they are incapable of rising to the high regions of ideas, and then eject their venom on every one superior to them in intelligence or virtue"—it is unnecessary to mention the names of "those reptiles" alluded to in his articles so frequently by Don Rosendo—and Pablo was engaged in laying siege to the hearts of several fair strangers who had arrived in the town. One morning he went out shooting with his brother-in-law, but finding that the cold spoilt his complexion, he gave up the sport almost entirely. Besides, Piscis greatly objected to it, for a clever centaur like he cared for nothing on earth but horses.

In the afternoon, when it rained, Ventura played *tresillo* with Cecilia and Gonzalo if she were in a good humor, and if not, the two latter played *tute* together, with a child seated on the lap of each; and although the little girls upset the game every moment by taking up a card in their tiny hands, the players were so good-tempered that they merely took them gently from them.

"Be quiet, Cecilita, be quiet; if you show your aunt my cards she will win."

"Never mind, auntie dear, look at them," said the child, laughing. When the game was over the elders watched the children make houses with the cards, whilst the rain-drops pattered on the Chinese windows and the logs of wood crackled on the hearth. The children had their meals with the family, and attending to them was an important occupation to Cecilia, for she had to serve them, to tie their bibs on, give

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them water, and see that they did not drop their food. When Gonzalo was at home he delighted in assisting at this repast and standing like a butler behind the chairs of his children. Then when they had to be taken to bed, Cecilia took one in her arms, and Gonzalo the other, and they carried them to the room where they both slept. The task of undressing them was long and complicated. Gonzalo, in spite of his ox-like strength, was as gentle as a woman in untying their strings and moving their little bodies from one side to another without hurting them. Sometimes the hands of the brother and sister-in-law touched each other; then a slight cloud overshadowed her smiling face, but Gonzalo noticed nothing. When the little ones were in bed, they smilingly listened to the innocent prayers which Cecilia said to "auntie." Paulina did not yet know how to address the Supreme Being, and so she only made the sign of the cross. Whilst they were going to sleep, papa and auntie had to remain close by the bedside without moving. If they talked together, the children were disturbed, and were a long time getting to sleep. Therefore they tried to keep silent, or they only exchanged a few words in low voices. Cecilia could not sleep without holding one of her aunt's ears. Gonzalo often objected to this fancy, and every day he spoke of making her give it up; but his sister-in-law did not mind it, and she even bent over the pillow to indulge it. Sometimes Gonzalo fell asleep on Paulina's pillow, especially when he had been out shooting, and on waking up he found himself close to the sweet, pale face of his sister-in-law, whose wide-open eyes were fixed on space.

"What are you thinking about, bag of bones?" he asked her as his eyes met hers.

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The girl collected herself with an effort, and smiled kindly.

"I don't know—nothing."

"Haven't you a lover?" he said one evening, raising her chin affectionately.

"Bah! what lovers could I have in this place?" returned Cecilia, coloring, and withdrawing her face.

"You could have one in Sarrio."

"And he can't care much not to come and see me all the months that we have been here. I have already told you that I am going to remain an old maid," she added with a smile.

"That can't be," replied the young man with fervor; "it can't be. It would be a shame to poor humanity for you to remain an old maid. You were born to be married. Your chief delights are in managing the house, looking after children, sewing and dusting. You will be a perfect wife, like Fr. Luis de Leon describes. It is intolerable to think of any one who could make any man happy remaining an old maid."

We do not know what Cecilia's thoughts were just then; but they were probably something like this: "Yes; I could have made any man happy but you."

She opened her lips with a gesture of indifference, and replied:

"What has that to do with it? All women who are not pretty have these qualities. Those who shine in the world think of their clothes, and they are right."

There was a sad, despairing irony in these words which Gonzalo could not but feel in his heart.

"Oh! you always talk this nonsense. I believe you put on this modesty to be contradicted—besides, we know that you can shine with the first. You have eyes that are unequalled; you are graceful, elegant, *dis-*

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tingués. What do you want more, bag of bones? The thing is, *señorita*, you have more here than here." And he put his finger first on his forehead, and then on his heart. "When somebody comes along who really interests you, you will see how all these ideas about celibacy will disappear."

Cecilia shrugged her shoulders and resumed her far-away look as she dropped the conversation.

With the month of April the family returned to Sarrio.

The municipal elections took place in June, and Gonzalo was elected town councillor against his will. Don Rosendo imposed the sacrifice upon him. Ventura regained her spirits with the approach of summer. She went out more frequently, and her open carriage always created a certain sensation. The fact was, it was very grand with its trappings from Paris. She liked to dress herself in black, for in her vanity she knew that it enhanced the brilliancy of her complexion, and brought out the golden hue of her hair. When she went to the eleven o'clock mass, which was the most crowded service, her presence excited a repressed murmur of curiosity among the women and of admiration among the men. The princess-like air that exasperated the ladies was what delighted the men. They all agreed that her beauty, elegance, and distinguished manners made her far superior to the other young women in the town, and would create quite a sensation in more aristocratic circles. Ventura had been of the same opinion for some time, and she turned over in her head the idea of going to live in Madrid. When she suggested it to her husband he expressed a great objection to the plan; he was not a man for the court; the social duties imposed by etiquette would be distasteful to him, for he was born

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for liberty, the enjoyment of the open air and sea, bodily exercise, and easy homely occupations. Besides, he was quite aware that the income upon which they lived among the first people in Sarrio would not be sufficient to keep them on the same social plane in Madrid, particularly with his wife's disposition. Nevertheless, Venturita was so sure of overcoming these objections that she ceased speaking of the project, but kept on thinking of the time and means of its fulfilment. An event then occurred to disturb the life of the Belinchon family. Gonzalo was unexpectedly elected *alcalde* of Sarrio through the influence of the Duke of Tornos. His first idea was to decline the appointment with some excuse, but Don Rosendo and all his friends were so eager and hot about his accepting it that he could not avoid doing so. The members of the Club were somewhat upset about it; they considered they were put upon, for the new *alcalde* would never allow the foundations of their enemies' houses to be laid bare, as Maza did, neither would he resort to any other extreme measure of their suggesting. In the month of September, when the bathing season was over which filled the town, and shooting began in the country, Gonzalo returned with his family to Tejada. The children were very well there, and he always liked it, besides, there was not much going on just then in Sarrio. His office of *alcalde* somewhat stood in the way of this move, but he arranged with his municipal colleagues to go to town every day, or at least very frequently. The journey could be made in a carriage in less than half an hour. Moreover, Don Rosendo kept his house open, so that Gonzalo could dine and sleep there as often as he liked. As Venturita was thinking of going to Madrid the next

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spring, she made no objection to these plans of her husband ; and he was glad to have made this arrangement when he found that the Duke of Tornos was coming in October, for life in Madrid had brought a recurrence of the malady which the air of Sarrio had benefited. Unwilling as he would have been to confess it, Gonzalo still felt the sting of jealousy in the inmost depths of his heart, and neither reflection nor specious argument with himself could eradicate it.

Whilst the duke was away he was free from that feeling, but the news of his approaching arrival was a vexation to him, if not an actual trouble. And in effect, at the end of October there was no escape from going to meet him at Lancia with his father-in-law and several gentlemen, all members of the Club. The *alcalde's* appointment through his influence made the grandee a powerful patron of the party. He put up at the Estella Hotel with his secretary, and commenced the outdoor life which he said, with truth, suited him so well. Several fine days he went out fishing, or walking, or shooting, or riding. This time he only brought two horses with him : one for a tilbury, and a magnificent saddle one ; so when the secretary rode, he used a horse that Don Rosendo put at his disposal.

The duke maintained cordial relations with the Belinchon family, but he had only been to Tejada three times in a fortnight. As Ventura and Cecilia frequently came to Sarrio, he saw them and talked to them, although he avoided being with them in public.

After the duke's arrival Gonzalo assiduously read "The Youth of Sarrio," which, like "The Light," came out three times a week. He read it to soothe the uneasiness which he felt, because he was in continual fear of some insulting paragraph like that which en-

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raged him so much the previous summer. In the first numbers after the grandee arrived, "The Youth" contented itself with showing its hostility towards the duke by making fun of him under such transparent nicknames as those of "painter," "fisher," and even "politician," and insinuating the idea that the duke was a person despised in Madrid, dismissed from court, and without influence with the Government. Some stories of his life were brought to light which were not much to his credit ; and even his habits about his clothes and cravats were made fun of. Don Jaime did not read such a little journal ; but when Peña showed him what was said about him he smiled maliciously, and wrote to the governor of the province asking him to take the first opportunity of suppressing the paper. The Club party hearing of this letter, joyfully anticipated the blow.

At last the poisoned arrow so much dreaded by Gonzalo pierced his heart ; it was not a paragraph, it was a story, supposed to have taken place in Scotland, in which he, his wife, Don Rosendo, and other well-known people were made atrocious objects of ridicule. Amongst other things, it was said that whilst the sheriff (evidently Gonzalo) was assiduously fulfilling the duties of his office, Lord Trollope (the duke) undertook for him the duties of husband to his beautiful wife.

Gonzalo felt the same sense of rage and misery as before ; but this time he decided to control himself and find out if there were any truth in the malignant insinuation, and if unfortunately there should be, he would take full and complete revenge.

It cost him great trouble to hide the feelings which preyed upon him, unaccustomed as he was to dissimulation, but he was greatly helped by his strong desire to

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put an end to his doubts. The only thing noticeable about him was that he seemed rather sad and preoccupied. He devoted himself for some days to watching his wife, never losing sight of her for an instant ; but he discovered nothing to confirm his suspicions. At the same time, he watched to see if and how the duke might have access to her. The result of his investigations was that he found that this could only be the case when he went to the municipal sessions. This was impossible by day, as the duke was not a person who could go unobserved ; it must then be in the hours of the night when he slept in town.

He determined to know the truth at once. To that end he announced to his family a few days in advance that a meeting of the Town Council would oblige him to sleep in Sarrio on Friday, for the meeting was an important one, as it was to decide nothing less than the appointment of one of the two doctors of the place, paid by the municipal corporation.

The Maza party had their candidate, and that of Don Rosendo theirs, and the contention was most bitter, not about the votes, which had been perfectly counted the previous day, but because the Cabin party, who had been defeated, had prepared a petition to Parliament to nullify the election of the enemies' candidate, by saying he had not had the months of practice considered necessary by the corporation to make the candidate eligible. The day of the great test found Gonzalo very upset. He had craftily tried to find out if any servant of the house was a party to the matter, or at least if he knew anything ; but he found out nothing which could make him think so. He breakfasted without appetite, and after swallowing his coffee he went off with his father-in-law. The meeting of the Town Council lasted till ten

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o'clock at night. Then he went home with Don Rosendo, who noticed that his son-in-law was preoccupied and abstracted. Gonzalo excused himself by saying that he was much irritated by the spleen and behavior of Maza's friends. They retired to rest at eleven o'clock, and then, when all was silent, our young man secretly left the house, and took the road to Tejada on foot.

The night was cloudy, but not very dark ; the light of the moon shone through the clouds, revealing objects at a short distance off. Gonzalo walked swiftly, with a thick sword-stick in his hand, and carrying a pistol in his pocket.

He felt very sad, and the test he was about to make filled him with mingled fear and remorse. If his wife were guilty, what a tragedy was at hand ! And if she were not, he was acting a low part to suspect her honor. He continued his course as furtively as if he were a robber about to break into a house, hiding under the walls along the road when he heard steps, and trembling when he heard a voice, far off as it might be. The idea that an acquaintance might see him on foot at that time made him ashamed, feeling quite certain that his object would be guessed.

The fresh air seemed to pierce his very bones, although he so rarely felt cold. There was a soft, melancholy sound from the rustling of the wind in the tops of the trees which lined the road like black phantoms. Under one of these he thought he saw a figure, and fearing to meet anybody who might know him, he jumped into the field ; but looking over the little wall, all that he saw was ruminating and recumbent cows. Then passing a workman's cottage, a window was suddenly thrown open and a woman appeared, which made him take to his heels under the shadow of

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the trees. As he proceeded on his way he felt a weight at his heart, and a thousand different ideas warred in his mind. He recollected the many delightful details of the first months of his married life : the sweet words and the ostensible proofs of love given him by his wife —his wife whose defects were those of all girls who are too much spoilt, and he began to think that he must be under some cursed hallucination, one of the thousand infamies invented by the enemies of his father-in-law to injure him, and he was on the point of returning to Sarrio and going back to bed when, on thinking over and weighing his grounds for suspicion, the recollection of the duke's departure from the house of his wife's parents, Ventura's frivolity and flirtiness and the veiled yet persistent attack of the inimical journal, fired his blood and urged on his steps. Oh ! shame on them if it were true ! Better for them if they had never been born ! And his hand tightening on the stick, he drew out the sword to make sure it was ready for use. The revolver did not suggest itself to him ; he wanted to see and feast his eyes on the blood of the traitors.

When he had covered half the distance to Tejada he suddenly heard behind him the gallop of a horse. Without knowing why, his heart gave a terrible jump, and he quickly leaped into the adjoining fields and anxiously waited, looking over the wall, for the horse to pass by. Before two minutes were over it went by like a flash. He was perfectly able to recognize the duke's chestnut steed ; he could not distinguish the grandee himself, as he was enveloped in a cloak, with a large hat drawn over his face ; but if his eyes did not see him, his heart saw him with perfect clearness. He stood stunned, rooted to the ground, and he felt a

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peculiar failing of the legs as if they were going to give way. But the blood soon resumed its healthy circulation in his athletic frame, his iron muscles quickly reasserted their strength, and, without touching it with his hands, he cleared the six-foot wall which enclosed the field. He sprang into the middle of the road, and without an instant's delay he pursued the horse at a mad, wild speed as if he were silly enough to try and catch up to it. Although he was long-winded, he was out of breath long before he reached the estate, and he had to stop three or four times to recover himself. At last he arrived at the shrubbery and entered by the iron gate, which was only latched. Casting a glance round, he saw the duke's horse tied to a tree. He hastily continued his course, carefully avoiding making any noise, by one of the paths lined with coniferas leading to the house, and, as he knew all the approaches, he did not go to the door—of which he had the key with him—for fear that some servant would hear him, but he climbed by a vine up to the window of his father-in-law's room, which was always left open when he did not sleep at home. Unfortunately, it happened to be closed. Then he drew out his sword, and putting it in the crack of the window, he raised the latch and thus effected an entrance.

He was, however, seen by one person—Cecilia. On one of the preceding nights she, occupying a room next to that of her sister, thought she heard a noise, and got up. She looked through the window towards the garden and saw Pachin, the servant, with another man she could not recognize. Nevertheless, an awful suspicion filled her with horror. The gait of the man, of whom she could only see the figure, was not that of a peasant. Gonzalo was sleeping that night at Sarrio ;

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besides, her brother-in-law was much taller. Dreadfully upset by a terrible idea, she retired to rest again, but not to sleep. All the following day she was sad and preoccupied, and she inwardly determined to watch her sister to know for certain if her thoughts were chimerical or real. So she kept her eye on Pachin, and she noticed that on the very day that Gonzalo was to sleep at Sarrio he was given a commission by Ventura, although he was not the one to make the house purchases. When he returned she wanted to see what he had brought. It was a French novel, which she could not take into her hand, as Ventura seized hold of it and went off to her room. She then had no doubt but what there was a letter between the leaves, and she determined to watch that night and ascertain the truth.

After dinner she sat sewing a while, whilst Ventura read by the light of the lamp; and when it struck ten, both sisters retired to their respective rooms.

Cecilia threw a cloak over her shoulders, put out the light, and sat by the window. She waited—one, two hours. When it was nearly twelve, she noticed two shadows among the trees, and, albeit with difficulty, she recognized Pachin and the man of the previous night, whom she now saw was the duke.

The two shadows quickly disappeared among the trees round the house. She stood petrified with horror; a wave of indignation rose in her heart and burst from her lips in the words:

“How infamous! How infamous!”

Then she seated herself on the window-sill, with her face pressed against the pane, as overwhelmed with confusion, shame, and distress as if she were the culprit. At the end of some minutes, standing with her terrified

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gaze fixed on the park, she saw another figure running with strange swiftness towards the house. She could not repress a cry of horror, and sprung to her feet as if she were worked by a spring; then stumbling in the dark through the furniture, she reached her sister's room, but it was all in darkness. For a moment she thought of calling her, but then she recollected that Ventura could not sin so close to her and her children. A few steps further, on turning the corner of a passage, she saw a light, and ran towards it. In the Persian chamber, of rotunda form, somewhat isolated from the rest of the house, there was a light; and she gave two little knocks at the door, saying through the keyhole:

"It is I, Ventura. Open! Gonzalo is here."

The door was then opened, and Ventura appeared, paler than death. The Duke of Tornos was at the other end of the room, and was turning to the window, with intent to jump out of it. But Cecilia ran towards him, and catching him by the arms, she cried:

"No, not that! It will be no use— Ventura, escape— To the kitchen! Gonzalo climbed up by papa's room."

The girl spoke in an imperious falsetto tone, with her eyes flaming.

Ventura required no repetition, for she precipitately left the room.

Then Cecilia forcibly dragged the duke to one of the sofas, and said:

"Sit down."

The magnate looked at her in stupefaction, and asked:

"Why?"

"Sit down, I tell you," said the girl in a fury, and

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at the same time putting her hands on his shoulders she pushed him down.

The duke at last sat down, and then Cecilia placed herself on his knees, and throwing her arms around his neck, she put her lips on his cheek.

At that moment quick steps were heard in the corridor, the door was violently thrown open, and Gonzalo appeared with his drawn sword-stick. Cecilia, turning her head, uttered a cry ; and the young man recognizing his sister-in-law, sheathed the arm which he carried, and hastily re-opening the door, he repaired in surprise and confusion to his old bridal chamber.

There Ventura was quietly reading by the light of a lamp. On seeing her husband before her she rose in surprise, saying :

“What is it ? How is it you are here ?”

An actress would gladly have bought from her that movement and tone of voice.

Gonzalo was taken aback, and knew not what to say ; but he got out of the difficulty by exclaiming :

“Don’t you know what scandal is going on in the house ?”

“What is going on ?” returned the girl, with a face so discomposed that if Gonzalo had been more observant by nature he would have seen that it could not have been solely due to his presence. He shut the door, and said in her ear :

“Your sister is in the Persian chamber with the duke ! Don’t you know anything about it ? Tell the truth,” he added, seizing her by the wrist.

Ventura was confounded ; she hesitated ; she trembled ; she lowered her eyes admirably well, and finally said :

“Why should you want me to know, Gonzalo ?”

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"Don't lie, Ventura!" he exclaimed with a furious gesture; but his heart was filled with immense and infinite relief.

"I am telling you the truth—I know nothing about it—but I suspected something. That is why I was alarmed. When you came in I was thinking of going to Cecilia's room to see if she were there."

"How shameful! How scandalous! But this infamy! Some course must be taken—this must be put an end to without anybody hearing of it."

"Yes, yes; but what do you want us to do?"

"I don't know. I will speak to your father— No, not to your father—it would be a fearful blow to the poor man. I will speak to the duke, and we'll see if he resists!"

At that moment they heard a noise in the adjoining room.

"Cecilia has gone to her room," said Ventura. "I will go now and speak to her myself. It will all be put a stop to, and remain a secret. I don't wish you to compromise yourself, Gonzalo mine," she added, throwing her arms around his neck. Gonzalo made a gesture of scorn.

"No, no; I don't want to. It is better for me to speak to Cecilia—wait a minute."

Her husband stopped her as she was leaving the room, and said in a low voice:

"Don't speak cruelly to her. Try and be prudent. It is infamous of him to have thus abused his friendship with the family. What a wretched creature!"

Ventura left the room, and repaired to that of her sister, trembling with alarm. The heroic girl was standing in the middle of the room, with her arms by her side and her eyes fixed on the ground. Ventura care-

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fully closed the door, and embracing her, she murmured in a tremulous voice :

“O my sister ! thank you, thank you !”

But Cecilia roughly repulsed her with a gesture of scornful pride, exclaiming :

“I did it for him, and not for you !”

Draws Aside the Veil

CHAPTER XVIII

DOÑA BRIGIDA DRAWS ASIDE THE VEIL

CECILIA would never do it again—she saw the wickedness of her conduct; she was sorry to have given Gonzalo's enemies ground for insulting his wife's honor, and she had given her word, and solemnly sworn, that those nocturnal meetings would not occur again.

Such was the message that Ventura delivered that night to her husband.

During the succeeding days he showed neither anger nor even severity against the delinquent. All his anger and ill-will were against the duke, whom he accused of having iniquitously abused the confidence of his father-in-law to arouse in poor Cecilia feelings that had hitherto lain dormant. He treated her with kindness, even to indulgence, such as he might have accorded a sick child in the desire to show her that she had lost none of his affection.

But this kindness was so humiliating to her, showing as it did that the man was quite contented in his conviction of her guilt, that she repulsed it, and in spite of her strenuous efforts to do so she failed to appear grateful for so much generosity.

She shut herself up in her room, without attending as before to the care of the children, and at meal-times she looked so grave and was so quiet that Don Rosendo's notice was attracted, absorbed as the great patrician was in the higher sphere of the battle of thought which was now being waged in Sarrio.

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And with his peculiar perspicacity he saw that it was a question of moral and physical weakness proceeding from the monotonous country life. Youth has its own needs, and these must be attended to.

"You are ill, Cecilia. You look pale and sad. You must leave here and live a freer life, in surroundings more befitting young people. We will go to Madrid for a couple of months in the spring. In the country you get asphyxiated like a bird under the bell of a pneumatic machine."

This great thinker occasionally used happy illustrations, drawn, like the present one, from physical and natural science. From the brightness with which the girl concurred with the suggestion he concluded that he had as usual found the key to the matter.

Ventura looked as usual. The terrible scene that had been enacted, the sacrifice of her sister, which she knew had incurred her righteous contempt, had not affected her. She went on just the same as before, just as careful of herself and careless of others as she had ever been. Nevertheless, whenever she encountered the clear, penetrating eyes of her sister she turned her own away. From the night of the affair she avoided being alone with her, which was very easy, as Cecilia had no wish to exchange a word with the treacherous girl.

Gonzalo feeling quite sure of his wife, revelled in his sense of security, and a recrudescence of affection arose between the couple.

Ventura had made him promise he would never again sleep away from home, and to this he agreed.

Thinking of his sister-in-law's sin, he frequently said to himself:

"The Lord preserve me from still waters, and I will take care of the running ones."

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And henceforth he not only pardoned the lightness and frivolity of his wife's vain disposition, which had once so much disgusted him, but came to regard these defects as a guarantee of her fidelity.

"There is nobody without some faults," he would say to himself, "and I would prefer her to have those that are above board."

Five or six days after the event related, "The Youth of Sarrio" published a paragraph, insinuating the same idea as that which had led Gonzalo to make the memorable nocturnal visit to Tejada. The young man read it without emotion and with a smile on his lips, laughing to himself at the mistake under which his enemies were laboring. Nevertheless, as it was, after all, an insult to have such things written, he determined to chastise its insolent authors, albeit in a matter-of-fact fashion. Therefore at nightfall he abruptly entered the office of "The Youth," when not more than three of the staff were present, one of whom was the traitor Sinforoso Suarez. Without saying a word Gonzalo fell upon them tooth and nail, with so much force and rage that they utterly succumbed to the attack. When one of them did rise from the ground a tremendous blow knocked him down again; and not only were they levelled, but the tables and cupboards were also overthrown, making more noise than an earthquake. When tired of administering this corporal punishment, he quietly left the place, laughing. A few people responded to the cries for help, but he said to them:

"It is nothing, señores; but the managers of 'The Youth' have had a thrashing up there; and, I say, look here! go up and tell those fellows that if they continue with these libels I shall be obliged to send them to prison."

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When the facts of the case were known the event caused some commotion. The members of the Cabin were in a frenzy, but Gonzalo inspired such deep respect, not so much from his position of *alcalde*, but from the terror of his fist, that they at last resigned themselves to overlooking the drubbing administered to their confederates.

The Carnival went by without any great festivity, for Sarrio was no longer the scene of the processions and cavalcades which had once been the talk of the province whilst converting the town into a miniature Venice. At one time all the inhabitants took part in the great burst of gayety. The rich not only decked themselves befittingly for the occasion, but they started subscriptions for the importation of gorgeous costumes from Madrid. The cavalcades were incessant and indefatigable in directing showers of almonds, caramels, and aniseed at the windows. The balls at the Lyceum, if not as brilliant, were as entertaining and as bright as those in the most opulent palaces of the court. Oh, the Carnival of Sarrio! Who in the south of the province, where these events took place, will cease to have grateful and tender recollections of it?

But all had changed with the Guelph and Ghibelline-like political strife between the members of the Club and the Cabin. Every one remained in seclusion at home, and the streets were only favored with the sight of some bold mummer, who afforded delight to the crowd of boys in his wake.

The titanic efforts of Don Mateo were powerless to awake any enthusiasm about balls at the Lyceum. It was in vain that he conferred with the marriageable girls of the place to get promises to help him, which promises were easily gained, but when it came

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to interviewing papa, he knitted his brows and gravely said:

“Well, we will see, Don Mateo; we will see.”

And this “we will see” generally signified a prudent abstention. For there might be there Mr. This or Mr. That, with whom the good papa was not on terms of acquaintance.

The previous year Don Mateo had tried to revive the old Píñate ball of glorious renown, known to all good Sarrio folks as the chief feature of the first Sunday in Lent, but the *alcalde*, who was then Maza, under cover of religion and trying to curry favor with the clergy of the town, would not give permission. This year the indefatigable old man returned to the task with increased ardor. Gonzalo made no objection to granting his permission. Then he stimulated the interest of the place to such an extent, by laying stress upon the extraordinary wonders and surprises of the famous globe, ordered from Bordeaux, that he ended by exciting a universal wish to be present that evening at the Lyceum.

So for the first time in Sarrio for several years the salon of the society promised a full attendance. During the days preceding the Sunday the talk and preparations of the young people drowned the disagreeable sounds of politics. It was like a moment's respite for the weary town. Directly Venturita heard that a ball was really in preparation, she ordered from her dress-maker a most magnificent dress to represent Queen Elizabeth of England, and one for Cecilia as a lady of the time of Louis XV. The latter at first declined to go to the ball, but Gonzalo made such a point of it, doubtless to rouse her a little from the melancholy to which she had lately fallen a prey, that she at last gave in, and several afternoons were employed in going to

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Sarrio, trying on the dresses and giving instructions to the dressmaker.

The longed-for Sunday at length arrived, and Gonzalo, who was very busy all the morning, lunched in Sarrio and returned about dusk to Tejada to dine with his family, and to escort his wife and sister-in-law to the ball.

When he arrived the ladies were dressing themselves in their different rooms, and a little after the usual hour they both appeared in the corridor in their elegant attire.

Cecilia was bright and loquacious, as those of a serious temperament are in moments of excitement; and she seemed to have shaken off the black thoughts that had lately cast such a gloom over her face.

Before taking his seat at table Gonzalo tried some playful jokes with her, as well as with his wife, and during the dinner he continued to laugh at their expense in his own genial, hearty way.

"Will not your majesty take a little sausage?" he said, addressing his wife. And then, delighted with his remark, he gave vent to a long, loud roar of laughter, like those given by barbarous kings at their festivities, while his enormous frame heaved convulsively.

His healthy, manly spirits were infectious, and no one could help laughing when he started.

Ventura was very amiable that evening, and she tapped her husband on the shoulder and begged him to be quiet, as she could not eat in peace.

When dinner was over and they were taking coffee, either through laughing too much or from some other cause, the young wife complained of indisposition; her dinner had disagreed with her. She expressed a wish to withdraw, retired to her room, and shortly returned,

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saying that she was not well, and that her head was aching. Tea was made for her, and she laid on the sofa for some time, but the pain and distemper remained.

"Look here! you go to the ball, and I will go to bed," she said, raising her head.

Cecilia, suddenly filled with a suspicion, replied:

"No; I will stay, too."

"How silly," exclaimed the invalid, "to deprive yourself of the only entertainment Sarrio has given for some time on such a frivolous pretext!"

"Yes," replied Cecilia with the same gravity; "I shall remain."

"But you know this indisposition hardly causes me any suffering. I am rather bilious; four or five hours' sleep will quite restore me."

"Well, I shall remain."

"Then I shall be obliged to go, ill or not ill," she said in an impatient tone, as she rose from the sofa.

"Ventura is right, bag of bones," said Gonzalo, taking his sister-in-law by the shoulders, and shaking her affectionately. "It is nothing. I have had it a hundred times. Why should you give up going to the ball? Here, here! get your mantilla. Ramon has already put the horses in; it is more than half-past nine," he added, pushing her towards the door. Cecilia could not resist him, but before leaving the room she cast a piercing glance at her sister, who avoided meeting it by resuming her seat. Ramon was, in truth, waiting for them with the family coach. The largest carriage was used that evening, as Don Rosendo and Pablito, who were dining in town, were to return with them in the small hours of the morning. During the drive Gonzalo was still chatty and merry, trying to amuse his sister-in-law, who had resumed her taciturn manner. The young

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man thought that she was still tormented by the recollection of the fatal scene already narrated, and so made every effort to distract her.

Arrived at the Lyceum, Gonzalo and Cecilia went in, arm in arm, and they crossed a large anteroom, where a crowd of young men made way for them, and greeted them with the familiarity usual in little towns. There were several ladies in the salon, all in fancy dress, although the majority of them, like Cecilia, wore no masks. This was an innovation in Sarrio.

For the last five years the balls at the Lyceum had been dreary affairs. But, thanks to the perseverance of Mateo, the flame of pleasure burst that night into a brightly burning bonfire. The youth of the town entered the empty salon like an overflowing torrent, making the place resound with the bright tones of their talk and laughter.

"Alvara, do you know me? do you know me? Why don't you marry? For you are on the road to old age."

"Periquito, do you like me? Why do you wear a mask? You don't want one. You are not taken with faces, and there you are right. Look here and look there. Eh? Ta ta, ta ta, Periquito."

"Hollo, Delaunay! Hollo, monsieur! How goes the aërial tramway? What will you have next? What a long head you have! It is a pity you are so unfortunate. They say you are not a practical man, but you knew how to settle the 'Rat's' daughter. Good-by. Good-by."

"And here's Sinforoso. When are they going to give you Cipriana's hand? They treat you very badly. Why don't you threaten to go back to the Club?"

It was a party of ladies in black dominoes who cut these jokes, which were at times too strong. The majority of them were old, for the younger ones liked to show their faces and the turn of their figures in some histor-

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ical costume. There were costumes of Venetian and Roman ladies, costumes of the lower empire, costumes of the time of Louis XV., of the Directory, of Philip II., and others, down to the most recent period. There were also gitanas, necromancers, slaves, and many other fanciful and romantic costumes not admitting classification. There was one representing a starry night, another a tulip, and another a carrier pigeon with a letter at her neck.

The men, as a rule, were not in costume. They wore the long, full frock coat which only came out on such occasions. Nevertheless, some wore a domino, which permitted them to talk to the girls they admired without fear of being interrupted by the mama.

A party of young fellows belonging to the Cabin conceived the happy idea of dressing up Don Jaime Morin as a bib-and-tucker young lady. When dressed up like this they told him that he would be better disguised with paint than with a mask, and he concurred with the suggestion. A young fellow then took up a box of paints and a brush, and pretending to dip it into several colors, he passed the brush several times over his face, but it had only been dipped in water.

Morin asked to see himself in a looking-glass, but the mischievous youths took good care not to give it to him. They all cried out: "But how capital you are, Don Jaime! How grotesquely you are painted! Your own mother would not know you!" Upon the strength of these words the good Morin allowed himself to be carried off to the Lyceum, where his young friends advised him to joke certain young ladies, to which he replied that his jokes would prove a shock to their nerves. And in effect, no sooner was he in the salon than he cried out to a young lady, in a falsetto voice:

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"Hollo, Rosarita! what have you done with Anselmo? We know that you throw him a letter out of the window every night at ten o'clock."

"But, Don Jaime!" exclaimed the girl, looking at him in surprise, "how did you find that get-up?"

"The devil! She knew me," said the good Morin, withdrawing. He then turned to another of the fair sex, with the same result "It is strange," he said at last, "they all know me at once. It must be the voice, because although I am painted with a vengeance——"

He was full of these reflections when a bony hand seized him from behind.

"Great ass! booby! idiot! Who got you up like that?"

It was his beloved spouse, the ingenious, severe Doña Brigida.

"Get along, stupid! You're always the laughing-stock of every place!" and she pushed the poor fellow out of the salon. The good lady, who was dressed in a domino and mask, went with him as far as the ante-room, where she left him, and returned to the ball-room to carry out her own devices, as we shall see.

Surrounded by a group of dominoes stood the kind Don Feliciano Gomez, whose shining, bald, pyramidical head overtopped the circle of ladies around him as they cracked their insufferable jokes, which sometimes bordered on insults.

"Feliciano, poor fellow! so your sisters let you come to the ball! At what time will they send for you? They say that Doña Petra beats you when you are late; is that a fact? Poor Feliciano! how strict your sisters are! Well, as they did not let you marry, they ought to give you a little more liberty."

The good merchant, without taking offence, gave

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kind, smiling replies to the harpies, who at last grew tired of his patience and left him in peace.

The charming Pablito, correctly attired in a frock coat, with a white *boutonnière*, was meanwhile courting a beautiful Jewish girl, sister of an artillery officer, who had just arrived. The poor girl was overjoyed at seeing at her feet the richest and most eligible young man in the town. What smiles! what meaning looks! The girls of the place cast derisive glances at her, as much as to say: "Enjoy yourself a little, unhappy one; you will soon be disillusioned."

Pablito, as he bent over her in a submissive way, whispered in her ear such ardent and ingenious phrases as:

"As I was coming from Tejada yesterday, I saw you with your papa, as pretty as ever."

"What nonsense! I saw you, too. You were driving an open carriage. You drive very well."

"That is flattery, Carmencita. To drive nowadays is nothing. Anybody can do it. If you had only seen those horses when I bought them! One was a caution. It takes about a year to let them have their head, driving them every day. Don Agapito's coachman nearly spoilt them altogether, especially the handsome one, don't you know, the left-hand one, a little darker than the other; he was quite spoilt. If he had fallen into other hands he would not have been worth more than 2,000 reales now. But now he is better than the other. It is a question of patience, don't you see?"

The beautiful Jewess remonstrated. "Come, don't make light of what we all know you do well."

"Patience and a little practice," repeated Pablito, on a bed of roses. Then he entered full swing on what he considered constituted a good driver: a firm, gentle hand, a quick eye, prompt castigation without loss of

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temper at any misdemeanor, and a perfect knowledge of horses, for without a careful, thoughtful study of the temperaments of the animals it is impossible to drive systematically.

Carmencita listened, quite entranced. Cecilia had not been long in the ball-room before she was joined by Paco Flores, the engineer, who had asked her in marriage through the mouth of Gonzalo. From the time the girl refused him the young man, who, as we have seen, at first thought only of winning a modest, capable wife with money, fell more in love with her, and became unremitting in his attentions. Self-love always plays a great part in love, and it is not often easy, even for the individual himself, to distinguish the one feeling from the other. When it was seen in Sarrio how persistent the engineer was in courting Belinchon's eldest daughter, it was thought that he was only anxious for her dowry; but this was a mistake, for Flores was really in love. If Cecilia had become suddenly poor he would have made her his wife all the same, for her behavior only increased his admiration of her. She always received his attentions and politenesses with kindness and gratitude. There was no fear that she would withdraw from the window when he passed by, nor snub him if she met him at any friend's house, nor commit any of those rudenesses that constitute the delight of the majority of girls.

She treated him like a good friend, and accorded him the kindness due to a person one esteems; but as soon as the engineer wanted to go further, if he asked for a little love, a ray of hope, he was met the next day with the same firm, gentle, persistent refusal. And the worst of it was, Cecilia had no pleasure in refusing, but pain, as it hurt her to disappoint a friend.

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This feeling was an additional blow to the suitor's self-love.

After dancing a waltz they sat down to rest in a corner of the salon. Flores had taken her fan and was fanning her respectfully.

"I should like to spend my life like this," he said in a sincere tone.

"Oh, you would soon get tired of it," returned Cecilia, smiling.

"Will you try me?"

The girl was silent.

"You are not, Cecilia, one of those women of whom one easily tires. You have treasures in your heart and mind that would always keep the man who loves you at your feet. You have had my heart for more than two years, and instead of wearying I feel myself more and more attached to you. I adore you more and more desperately, to the point of being the laughing-stock of the place."

"That is nonsense," she replied, albeit touched by the fire and feeling that Flores had given to his words. "It is not the same thing seeing a woman a little while now and again, and speaking to her of this and that, as having her continually with you."

"What should I like better, Cecilia, than to have you always with me!" returned the engineer in a low, trembling voice, playing with the fan, with his eyes on the ground. "To consecrate my life to your service, and to adore you on my knees . . . I know that you would make any man happy, but no one as much as I, for I know the great qualities of your soul, and I divine secret feelings in your heart quite unknown to others. It is terrible that you will not give me the remotest hope that some day, distant as it may

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be, my love will conquer you, and you will accept me as a slave."

"I accept you as a friend, as a great friend," said the girl gravely.

"Friend, bah! This friendship, Cecilia, is a stone wall between you and me. I understand that I do not deserve to win your love . . . that there are a hundred young men in the town who could ask it with a better right; but what is so strange, and what encourages and discourages me at the same time, is that until now you have chosen nobody. Your heart remains empty and indifferent . . . that is to say, unless you have some hidden love."

Cecilia shivered slightly and raised her eyes a little to the place where the voice of Gonzalo was audible. Then she replied with more severity than usual:

"Cease studying my heart, Flores. In the first place, because it is most probably as commonplace as that of the majority of women, and in the second place, because, if there were something hidden in it, it would not be easy for you to discover it."

"Don't be offended, Cecilia. This study is only a proof of my interest in you."

"I am not offended," replied the girl, trying to smile. "I am going to speak to Rosario. Will you escort me to her?"

In the anteroom, only separated from the ball-room by a few pillars, the grave fathers were chatting and casting pleased looks to where their daughters were disporting themselves. Sometimes a masked lady detached herself from the dancing and came to rally them, and sometimes, being a contemporary, would make them laugh till they coughed, and then brought out some of their old stories.

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Don Rosendo was chatting in a corner with Don Melchor de las Cuevas. He was laying before him one of his grand and magnificent projects of which the port was now the object. It is impossible to imagine how much more versed in knowledge Belinchon had become in the last few years, and as with all great men, it was knowledge more intuitive than studied. At first, when he wrote for "The Light" on any subject of which he was ignorant, he was reticent, vacillating, and timid, but as he grew conversant with the topics of the day, and had at his command a quantity of hackneyed phrases, and, above all, when he possessed an encyclopædic dictionary in fifteen volumes, which did not cost him less than 2,000 reales, he tackled any point with tooth and nail. There was not a subject or scientific, social, economical, and political problem upon which Don Rosendo did not undertake to throw some light. If it was a question of the plague which was decimating the cattle, Don Rosendo sought in his dictionary for the words cattle, horse, bull, sheep, forage, live stock, etc., and as soon as he had read what was said on the subject he took up his pen, and his journalistic genius was brought to bear on the production of one or several articles pregnant with philosophy and erudition.

At the time the question of the port came up, he lost no time in looking in the dictionary for the words port, dockyard, tides, dredges, winds, etc. Seven consecutive articles were written and published to show the necessity of making a dockyard for Sarrio at a spot called Foril. He posed as a consummate seaman, used to navigating the seas and grown gray in the study of hydraulic problems. However, the Señor de las Cuevas, although less eloquent in such a vocabulary of maritime terms, some of which he did not even know, writhed at the

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wordy explanation given him by Don Rosendo, and ended by clapping him on the shoulder, and saying:

"You can disabuse your mind, Belinchon, about your dockyard. When the wind is in the northeast no sardines come in."

The one who enjoyed the entertainment most was an old man, the good Don Mateo, to whom it was entirely due. To him the ball represented one of the great triumphs of his life. It had cost him more trouble than enough to assemble together the cantankerous town-folk. He never stopped all the evening, going, or rather dragging himself, from place to place, giving orders to the servants, the wardens, and the orchestra.

"Gervasio, now for the plates of *confetti*! Take one down each side, you fellows! What do you want, Señor Anselmo? Do the boys want a *rigodon* instead of a *valse*? Then let them play a *rigodon*. Tell the young men that there are ladies in the dressing-room waiting for partners. Marcelino! where has Marcelino got to? Go down to the porch, for some vagabond has thrown a stone at the lamp and broken it. But, Don Manuel, it is not more than two o'clock! You won't take away the girls yet, and the *piñata* not yet broken."

The good gentleman was rejuvenated that evening. He shared the pleasure of the young people as mystics rejoice in a general communion. His dark eyes occasionally looked over his spectacles at the wooden globe hanging in the middle of the room, and he gave a chuckle of delight. The beautiful work of art from Bordeaux was painted with blue and white stripes, and there hung from beneath it a quantity of ribbons of various colors, all of which, with one exception, were held by young ladies ready to pull them, and the one who had the ribbon that opened the *piñata* won the globe,

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which was doubtless filled with *confetti*, and, according to report, with very pretty knick-knacks. Gonzalo, in the middle of the party, seemed also in good spirits, being sometimes with one lady, sometimes with another. He had danced a *rigodon* with his sister-in-law, and a polka and a waltz with two friends of his wife. His tall, colossal form rose like a tower above the heads of all.

"How cheerful you are, Señor *Alcalde*!" said a lady of the lower middle class.

"One has to profit by Ventura's absence," returned the young man with a laugh. "Where is your husband, Magdalena?"

"Oh, somewhere about."

"Come, dance this polka with me, and let us make hay whilst the sun shines."

"I can't. I am engaged to Peña for it."

Whilst he was joking thus with those about him, a woman enveloped in a black domino, with a mask of the same hue, never lost sight of him for a moment, sometimes standing at one spot, sometimes at another, but always at a short distance from him, whilst her two shining, fiery eyes were visible through the holes of her mask. It was Doña Brigida, the ingenious wife of the spendthrift Morin, who was watching for the right moment, like the baritone in "*Un Ballo in Maschera*," to strike the blow. The victim in that case was a prince, in this it was only an *alcalde*. The reasons of the eminent lady for meditating this crime would not appear so weighty as those of the baritone in the eyes of a man, but they certainly would to any woman.

"The Light of Sarrio," in its anxiety to wound all members of the Cabin, with their relations and their friends, had for the last three or four months taken up

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Morin's wife as a theme. Thus all her domestic secrets were shown up: her married life, the dependence and degradation of Morin were caricatured, whilst all the anecdotes, more or less funny, that were the current talk of the town, appeared in print, with the addition of several others, discovered or invented by the malignant editors.

And as if this were not enough, there was not a number of the paper in question which did not make mention in some way or other of Doña Brigida's wig, which fact thus became public property in Sarrio. The anger, the rage, the hate, and the desire for revenge which all this aroused in the lady is impossible to imagine. Suffice it to say that when she met one of the managers of "The Light" in the street she turned livid, and it was only by a great effort that she restrained herself from springing at his throat like a mad cat. Hitherto she had had no opportunity of satisfying this thirst for revenge with which she was consumed. But now, with Gonzalo before her eyes, she was filled with delight, she trembled with eagerness, like a tiger in sight of his prey. Taking advantage of a moment during which nobody was speaking to him, she came closer behind him, and swiftly placing herself in front of him, she hissed, more than said:

"Gonzalo, why are you so stupid? You are the laughing-stock of everybody. There is not a person in the room who does not know that your wife is this moment with the Duke of Tornos."

The young man was stunned, as if he had received a blow on the forehead; he turned deadly pale, and then made as though he would tear off her mask; but that was impossible, for Doña Brigida had slipped away like an eel among the crowd, and as there were many ladies

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in the same costume, it was impossible to know which was the one he sought. Then Gonzalo quickly left the room, the words he had heard ringing in his head like hammer strokes. He feared he must fall. In the ante-room he replied with a stupid smile to the remarks made to him; and his uncle, Don Melchor, seeing him so pale, came up to him, and said:

"What is the matter, Gonzalillo? Are you ill?"

"Yes; I am going to get a cup of tea."

"I'll go with you."

"No, no; I shall be back directly." And he ran off, leaving his uncle standing at the door.

He descended the staircase, and found himself in the street without knowing what he was doing. The fresh night air cooled his head and revived his memory. He suddenly determined to go to Tejada. He looked about for the carriage, but not seeing it, he thought Ramon had not left home yet. He looked at his watch; it was only half-past two. He took a few quick steps towards his father-in-law's house, when he recollected he had no hat or overcoat on. Returning to the Lyceum, he told the first servant he met in the hall to bring him down his hat and coat.

Arrived at the house, he found Ramon had already put the horse to the carriage.

"Ramon, drive me as fast as possible to Tejada at once."

The coachman looked at him in surprise.

"Is madame worse?"

"I think so," he replied, getting into the carriage.

"But stop at the corner by the mill, you understand?"

"You are afraid of disturbing madame, eh?" queried the coachman with great astuteness. Gonzalo did not reply.

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The horses went off at a trot, making the carriage jolt along the stony, uneven road of the town. Gonzalo did not notice how the movement shook every bone in his body, nor the change to the high-road on leaving the town. All his attention was concentrated on one point. Was it true, or was it not?

Strangely enough, without himself knowing why, the conviction that his wife had deceived him entered his soul and took possession of it. When he went to Tejada on foot, about two months before, he had not wished to harbor this conviction; however much he tried to convince himself that the insinuation of the paper was true, his head and his heart declined to admit the idea. Now it was quite different; he tried to think and to persuade himself that the accusation of the masked lady was only a vile exhibition of the envy and jealousy of some hidden enemy, and yet he could not believe it.

When the carriage stopped he had no idea of the time he had been driving; it might just as well have been a day as a minute. He awoke from his dream, and jumped out of the carriage.

"Now go back for the family," he said to Ramon; "and don't say you have brought me; there is no need to trouble them."

He then turned slowly towards the gate of the park some two hundred feet off, whilst the carriage went down an opposite road. Arrived at the gate, he pushed it with a trembling hand; it was open, like the previous time. He felt a chill at his heart, which obliged him to stop. He finally entered cautiously, and looked up to see if the key were inside; but it was not there. The night was neither clear nor dark; the sky was overcast, and a fine rain was falling which penetrated to the skin. It made no sound as it fell upon the trees and bushes

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of the park, but when disturbed by a gust of wind a quantity of drops came down in a regular gust, which made a quick, passing, ringing sound on the ground.

Gonzalo suddenly recollected that he had no weapon with him; but then he shrugged his shoulders in scorn born of the absolute confidence that in the case of necessity he would not be found wanting. He looked about on all sides to see if he could see the duke's horse, but instead of seeing it he caught sight of the shadow of a man disappearing among the trees; so he ran after him, but he quickly vanished. He thought it was Pachin, the man-servant, and he then suspected that he was the traitor who had opened the gate to the duke. Ever since the night when he had discovered his sister-in-law with the grandee, his incessant efforts to find out who had helped the duke into the house had been fruitless. He could not have suspected anybody less than such an old servant as Pachin. Then, as he thought that the man might possibly go and warn the traitors, he continued his course towards the house as quickly as possible. He once more climbed to his father-in-law's room, but this time only as far as the window. Swiftly on tiptoe he automatically turned to the Persian chamber, as if, having met the duke there once, he must necessarily be there again. Great, therefore, was his surprise to find it dark and deserted. He stood a moment riveted to the spot, but suddenly, struck by an idea, he ran to the room where Ventura slept. The door was locked from the inside. He called out quickly:

"Ventura! Ventura!"

"Who is there?" cried his wife from within in a frightened, strange voice.

"It is I. Open, open directly."

"I am in bed."

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"No matter, open at once."

"Let me dress."

"No; open directly, or I'll break the door."

"I am coming! I am coming!"

The young man waited a minute, but instead of the door he thought he heard the window of the room being opened.

"Open, Ventura!" he cried in a rage. And receiving no answer, he gave such a blow at the door with his powerful cyclopean leg that it burst the lock with a loud noise. The room was in darkness.

"Ventura! Ventura!" he cried.

No answer. He struck a match with a trembling hand, and gave a look round the room. His wife, pale and affrighted, was cowering in a corner in *deshabille*. Gonzalo turned his eyes from her and looked all round in search of some one, until he noticed the window half open. Throwing it up and leaning out, he saw something white running under the trees—it was the figure of a man in his shirt-sleeves.

Gonzalo did not stop to climb down from the window; he took a flying leap into the garden, and darted after the fugitive like an arrow. But the man had already reached the iron gate, opened it, and disappeared. Gonzalo was not far behind him, but an instant later he saw him on horseback, under the shadow of the trees, dash down the road in the direction of Nieva.

Inspired, nevertheless, with an insane hope of catching him, Gonzalo rushed back to the stables, took out his beautiful saddle-horse, and putting on a bridle, he jumped on his bare back, and also took the road to Nieva with all speed possible. He had neither spurs nor whip, but the brave animal obeyed his voice, or rather his roars, and went at a furious pace. The eyes

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of the horse saw the road, but the rider was only conscious of a black abyss, which seemed about to swallow him up, and the old elms that lined the road seemed to fly by like a ghastly procession of phantoms.

On, on, on.

The noble brute flew on as if impelled by a goad for about half an hour.

"It is impossible," said Gonzalo to himself, "that his horse is better than mine. He had at least a start of two gun-shots of me!" But just as he was thinking this, and was hesitating about reining in the horse, he passed by one that stood saddled, but riderless, by the side of the road. He made his own steed halt with some difficulty, and turning back to see what it was, he recognized the duke's English mare.

"Oh," he roared, "now I've got you!" For he thought his enemy must have had a fall. He dismounted and searched the ground, but no rider did he find. Then he said to himself: "Perhaps hearing the gallop of my horse, and fearing that it would overtake him, he has hidden himself somewhere about here."

He then sprang into the neighboring field, and made as careful a search as he could by the light of matches: he looked behind the hedges, he searched the brambles, then he went some way along the bank of a stream on his left, but his box of matches came to an end before he could discover his enemy, so he retraced his steps, mad with rage.

If the Duke of Tornos were hidden somewhere about there, he must have had an anxious time of it.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE STORY ENDS WITH IMPORTANT AND SAD EVENTS

AFTER seeing her husband disappear through the window, Ventura dressed herself quickly and left the room to find a servant. Just at this moment Pachin arrived with a disconcerted face, carrying a light.

"The señorito is rushing after the duke across the garden," he said in a hardly audible voice.

"Will he catch him?" asked the unfaithful wife, very pale, although somewhat recovered from her fright.

"I don't think so; the duke has his horse tied to the Antony vine. He had the start, and, once mounted, it will be impossible to overtake him."

"Where shall I hide myself? If he comes back he will kill me."

"It will be best to leave the house. Come with me."

The girl then followed the servant along the passages, down the back staircase and out by the kitchen door. Pachin wished to take her to the parish-priest's house, which was near to the estate. When they were entering the garden they saw Gonzalo running towards the house, and they only just had time to hide behind the Washingtonia close to the dining-room. From there they saw him go into the stable, bring out a horse and go off full gallop, and Ventura thought she would die of fright.

"No, no; I don't want to go to the curé's house. He will return soon, and the curé could not defend me

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from him . . . he is a poor old man. . . . I want to go to Sarrio."

"But, señorita, to Sarrio at this hour, and raining?"

"Is there no carriage?"

"There is the landau, but there are no horses. Wait a bit. I will alter the shafts, and we will harness Señorito Pablo's mare. . . . I don't answer for her going in it."

"Capital! capital!"

Pachin carried out his idea as quickly as possible. Ventura got into the carriage, and off they went.

Although at first the mare rebelled a little, once on the high road, the thought of the stable at Sarrio, her usual abode, made her go very well.

The girl told the servant to drive her to Don Rudesindo's house, as she was on rather intimate terms with his wife. There she remained until two or three days after the event, when her father took her to Madrid, and from thence to Ocaña, where she was shut up in a convent by the joint arrangement of Gonzalo and Rosendo. The great patrician, as we know, was not much in favor of positive religions, but "as long as society provided no other coercive measures for certain moral transgressions, he was perforce led to look for them from old social institutions, deficient and vitiated as they might be."

We must now return to Gonzalo. He passed the whole day locked in his room in a state of agitation approaching madness. The only person who ventured to enter his room was Don Rosendo, who talked to him in a kind and dignified style, adorned with periphrases and florid periods befitting his character as a writer. He took a seat by his side and cursed his daughter, "whose inexpressible conduct, defying [Don Rosendo

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had lately taken a great fancy to this verb] at once morality, law, and social practice, had placed her beyond the pale of all legal and family protection."

It was he who suggested shutting her up for a time in a convent. Poor Gonzalo, overwhelmed and distraught, never answered a word, but listened to him whilst walking backwards and forwards across the room with his hands in his pockets and his eyes wet and gloomy. Once only he raised his head to say with firmness:

"Take her where you like . . . but don't let her see my children. I do not want her lips to touch them."

At dusk a servant came to tell Gonzalo that two gentlemen had arrived in a trap, who wished to see him on urgent business. Guessing immediately the import of the matter he said at once: "Show them in."

Two gentlemen from Nieva then entered. One was the Marquis of Soldevilla, a middle-aged man, quite bald, with a complexion marked with erysipelas, and black teeth. He talked in a loud tone to seem at his ease. The other, named Golarzo, was old, gray, and a man of few words on friends. They came on behalf of the duke to arrange a serious matter that had happened the previous night—about an affair of honor. The duke did not wish to rob the Señor de las Cuevas of the reparation due to him. To run away on such an occasion was not according to his habits nor his character, neither was it befitting his social status. But at the same time, in the interest of Gonzalo and himself, he expected that all would be executed with as much privacy as possible.

Without wincing, and affecting a calmness he was far from feeling, Gonzalo put no check to the loquacity of the marquis, which bordered on impertinence.

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"All right," he said, when he had finished. "I accept the challenge, and I am ready to fulfil it when it suits you. But it is rather odd," he added with a nervous laugh, which badly cloaked the anger which consumed him. "It is rather odd for the Señor Duke to send the challenge, seeing that I am the injured party. This course seems to me more prompted by fear than by gentlemanliness."

"Señor de las Cuevas," broke in the ex-colonel with acerbity, "we cannot permit these derogatory remarks to be made in our presence."

Gonzalo looked at him in an absent way as if he had not heard him, and then continued :

"In fact I could, and even I ought to reject this challenge, because it is not customary for decent men to fight scoundrels, even if they bear the title of king."

"Señor de las Cuevas," exclaimed Golarza, rising in anger from his seat, "this is insufferable, and I will not permit you to speak like this."

"The Duke of Tornos is a scoundrel, and you know he is," he returned, looking him straight in the eyes in a provocative way.

The fact was, it would have required some courage to withstand Gonzalo at that moment. Golarza turned white and, rising, said :

"This is your house, therefore I retire."

"Do you want me to say it to you outside?" he exclaimed impetuously as he also rose from his seat.

"Señores," cried the marquis in his cracked voice, "calm yourselves. Golarza, you have no right to get angry. The sort of injury that our patron has done the gentleman (and I am sorry to have to refer to it) excuses his want of appreciation of his character. I think from the moment he accepts the duel he has

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sufficiently atoned for the tone of his remarks, the outcome of the natural anger to which he is a prey."

Gonzalo felt inclined to hurl the table beside him at the fulsome peacemaker ; but he stood motionless and silent because of his ardent desire to come face to face with the duke.

The ex-colonel resumed his seat at the entreaty of his companion, and either from spite, or from fear of the young man's irascible state, he did not utter another word. Gonzalo said that he would depute two friends, who would arrange with them the details for their meeting at Nieva in the morning. In the meanwhile they would be returning to the town, unless they would do him the honor of being his guests that night.

The friends of the duke thanked him and proceeded to withdraw. When they were standing ready to go, Gonzalo, addressing himself to the marquis, said :

"I request that your conferences with regard to this duel, and the duel itself, may take place in Nieva—because—" he added in a tone half sarcastic, half tremulous, "strange as it may appear to you, in this house there are people who love me."

The seconds promised to concede to this wish and they then returned to Nieva.

After Cecilia saw them depart she haunted her brother-in-law's door without daring to go in. But coming out in search of Pablito the young man met her in the half-dark passage ; when the girl, seizing him by the hand, fixed an imploring look upon his face. She said :

"Do not fight, Gonzalo."

Mustering up the strength to dissimulate, he exclaimed, scornfully :

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"I fight with this *canaille*! Never! I will kill him when I meet him."

She believed his words, but she turned to say in a broken voice :

"Don't do it, for the sake of your innocent children."

"For my children and for you," he returned, caressing her cheek affectionately with his hand.

And overpowered with emotion he hastily withdrew.

On meeting Pablo he said in a low tone :

"I can speak openly with you ; you are a man, and you know that there are things in life that are inevitable. The seconds of the duke have just gone, and I have just deceived Cecilia by promising not to fight. But, as you will understand, that is impossible."

"Why?—No, you ought not to fight—I am the one—I ought to kill this wretched fellow," impetuously exclaimed the handsome youth.

"Thanks, Pablo, thanks," returned Gonzalo gravely, in an unsteady voice, and clasping his hand effusively, "but that can't be. Think a little over the affair, and you will see that your affection and kind wishes lead you astray."

It cost Gonzalo some trouble to convince Pablo that he was the one who should fight the duke first, and his not very fertile brain was much exercised in his search for reasonable and logical arguments in support of this decision.

Pablo only gave in after a long discussion and with the understanding that if Gonzalo were wounded in the duel he should challenge the duke.

There was something in the loyalty and affection shown him by all the family, and in the open and decided way in which they ranked themselves on his side

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and repudiated the erring daughter and sister, which touched, while it overwhelmed him.

This magnanimous conduct obliged him to be generous and not mention the name of the faithless girl in conversation, as he could not do so in measured language.

Pablito was not so reticent, but he saw that it was better not to continue the subject.

“Look here, go early to-morrow to Sarrio and take the letters I will give you to Alvaro Peña and Don Rudesindo. Let them proceed at once to Nieva, trying to keep out of sight as they pass by here. Let them arrange the matter as quickly as possible, and send word to Sarrio about the day and time. You will get it there, and bring it straight to me. Then I will manage to leave here without letting your father and Cecilia know about it.”

Having received his directions Pablo went off on horseback to Sarrio at daybreak to execute them, and Peña and Don Rudesindo at once proceeded to Nieva.

Gonzalo from his bedroom window saw the carriage, in which they were, go by.

As may be supposed, the gossip in Sarrio was terrible. Nothing else was spoken about. The friends of Belinchon looked glum, and there were several who blamed Don Rosendo for having so spoilt his youngest daughter and having put up with her airs and graces of a princess.

The enemies of the patrician were in a state of pure delight and added a thousand particulars to the scandal.

The few impartial people in the place contented themselves with pitying Gonzalo, and censuring the repugnant proceeding of Marin's malicious spouse;

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for every one knew it was she who had put the match to the train. Many inquisitive people passed in front of Don Rudesindo's house, and gazed eagerly at the windows, and tried to glean from the servants, as they came out, what was going on within. It was said that Ventura was very quiet, and showed little sorrow for her conduct, for she had dined and joked and laughed with the wife of the cider manufacturer. It was thought that the eager curiosity shown in this quarter would have distracted attention from Don Rudesindo's expedition to Nieva with Peña. But the object of the journey was suspected, and the news ran through the town like wildfire, that Gonzalo was to have a duel with the duke, no one knew where.

Don Melchor de las Cuevas lived alone with a man and a woman-servant. The night of the ball he went home and, calling at the Belinchons, they told him that Gonzalo had gone to Tejada ; so not feeling well, the old man retired to bed without any suspicions.

The following day he still felt indisposed, not being accustomed to late hours, so he remained at home. However, he sent his man to Belinchon's to ask after his nephew, and there the servant heard all that had happened. But not daring to tell his master the news, the servant brought back the message that Gonzalo was all right at Tejada.

That day went by, and on the following, which was Tuesday, the servant heard that the young man was to have a duel with the duke. Then, either fearing to incur responsibility; or because he thought his master could prevent the trouble, he told him the whole story, albeit with some reservations.

Don Melchor, wounded in his tenderest affections, jumped up from his arm-chair and ordered a carriage

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to be fetched at once to take him to Tejada, and when it came to the door he got in, telling the driver to go with all speed to Belinchon's country place. Don Rosendo was the first person he saw, and he received him with some confusion and shame, as if he shared in the disgrace weighing upon Gonzalo. Don Melchor was rather cold to him, not intentionally, but from his desire to see his nephew. Don Rosendo took him to his room door, and there left him. Then the Señor de las Cuevas rapped with his knuckles.

"Who's there?" was sharply asked from within.

Whereupon the old man turned the handle, and went in without answering. Gonzalo, who was standing in the middle of the room, turned as red as fire on seeing his uncle, who clasped him affectionately to his breast.

Copious tears then flowed down the young man's face. Nobody had seen him weep during that trying time, but the old man had been a father to him from his infancy, and he had no shame in revealing to him the most hidden wounds of his heart.

They remained for some time in each other's arms; and Don Melchor at last released his nephew and, pushing him towards an arm-chair, he said:

"Sit down."

So Gonzalo dropped into the seat and hid his eyes with his hand.

"It is a heavy blow," said the sailor in a hoarse voice, after a long silence—"a treacherous squall has put your bark under water. But you are a ship of much strength," he added, placing his hands on the young man's herculean shoulders. "You have solid bulwarks—we will weather the storm yet."

Gonzalo made no answer.

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"Why did you not come home at once?"

"Because it would have been a cruel slight on this poor family in its deep affliction. They have been so kind to me."

"If that is so, you did well—but you ought to have told me— I don't forgive you for that."

"But why? The later you heard the bad news the better."

"That's not so! I am like your father, Gonzalo, and I can sympathize with you— They tell me you are going to have a duel with him—with that pirate. Is it so?"

"No—no such thing now—" returned the young man with some hesitation.

"Don't deceive me, Gonzalo! This duel cannot take place. I have come determined to prevent it."

"There is nothing going on, uncle. Make yourself easy."

"It is useless for you to deceive me. I won't leave you for a moment. Here I will remain, I will sleep by your side so that you don't escape me, and I will keep guard over you from dawn, to mid-day, and till eve."

Gonzalo stood aghast, seeing that it was necessary to confess all, and to face the matter.

"And if it were true, what of it, uncle? Would you dare to prevent your nephew doing what is exacted by honor?"

"Yes, sir— And don't speak to me of daring!— Yes, sir, I dare," returned the old man in a rage.

"Do you want me to give my consent to your losing your life through a villain, a rogue, who crept into your house to villainously betray your honor? Rogues like that are strung up, or shot, one does not fight them. You are blind, Gonzalo. Stop a moment, man,

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get to the bottom of the scandal and you will see that it does not hold water."

"What would you have me do then? Do you want me to let him go off quietly to Madrid? Do you want me to see him off and wish him a pleasant journey, and thank him for the kindness he has done me?"

"No, he has been curse enough; kill him if you like, but don't lose your own life."

"That is very easy to say, uncle," replied Gonzalo caustically. "Imagine that I go to Nieva, I seek him out, I shoot him, or I kill him with a blow—then I am taken off to prison, and however righteous my cause was, I have to undergo some years' incarceration—Allowing that the majority of men exonerate the deed, they would not think it a very brave one."

Don Melchor stood some moments confounded, not knowing what to reply, but he did not give in. Finally he raised his head quickly, his eyes shining with delight.

"I have found a solution!"

"What?"

"You remain quietly at home. I will go myself to Nieva, meet the duke, and kill him."

"Oh! uncle, many thanks! But it cannot be," returned Gonzalo, unable to repress a smile.

"What are you laughing at, silly?" exclaimed the good old man, with his eyes blazing. "You think perhaps your uncle is a useless old hulk, who cannot handle a sword or a pistol? The devil take it! the devil!" he added, each time with more anger, and gesticulating about the room like a madman—"I am the same as I was at twenty years of age—I run upstairs four steps at a time without any fatigue—I drink five bottles of pale ale without it getting into my head—I

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can knock a bull down with a blow, and I can launch a heavy boat. And is all this anything to laugh at, and snap your fingers at in such a brutal fashion?"

"I am not laughing at that, uncle . . . I know, I know."

"Let's see, then; give me your hand and feel if I can squeeze it or not."

Gonzalo gave him his hand, and the old sailor squeezed it with all his strength, his face red and contorted. Although not much hurt, the young man feigned most dreadful pain.

"My! my!"

"Eh, well?" exclaimed the uncle with an air of triumph. "Can I, or can I not free the world of a villain?"

"I know you can! you are stronger than I . . . But that is not the question. The thing is to see what is to be done; if it would be right for you or for me. Don't you see, uncle, that the disgrace of being a deceived husband rests solely upon me, and it would be made much, inconceivably worse, if you fought the duel and not I? I know that this disgrace must be wiped out with blood, but it must be blood shed by my hand."

Don Melchor did not wish to concur in this opinion; he argued, he scolded, and he grew angry. Nevertheless it was evident that this density was assumed. Gonzalo's arguments began to take effect upon his mind, and filled his soul with bitterness. At last he beat a retreat, only asking for the duel to be postponed, for him to travel for a time, and if on his return he still wished to fight he should do so.

The discussion was still going on when Don Rosendo called outside the door to ask them if they would have luncheon there or come down to the dining-room.

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Gonzalo chose the latter course, as he was anxious to show no coldness towards his father-in-law and sister-in-law.

The luncheon was melancholy.

In spite of the efforts made by all, Gonzalo included, to seem unconcerned, a black cloud hung over the party and overshadowed their faces. After taking coffee, and sitting quiet a little while, Gonzalo said :

"Uncle, you left your bed to come here. You cannot feel well. Shall a room be got ready for you ? I believe you ought to go to bed." Then Don Melchor, seeing that his nephew wanted to be alone, said :

"No; I am going back to Sarrio. Let them put to."

He then took leave of Belinchon and Cecilia, and Gonzalo walked with him as far as the park gate. They were both silent and gloomy ; and the old man was extremely pale. Before getting into the carriage, he gave his nephew a long and affectionate embrace, and in a broken voice he said in his ear :

"Give him a blow in the bulwarks, my boy."

When they parted, his face was bathed in tears, and getting into the carriage, he hid himself in a corner unable to say good-bye.

Gonzalo looked after the vehicle and stood for some time motionless, holding by an iron bar of the gate.

Pablito returned from the town early in the evening. After dinner, he found an opportunity to say quickly to his brother-in-law :

"To-morrow at eight at Soldevilla's place. Pistols. Peña and Don Rudesindo will go by here at six. Be ready."

Gonzalo slept that night better than the previous one. The fierce satisfaction of the certainty of meeting the duke the following morning calmed his nerves.

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At five in the morning he awoke active and fresh with no recollection of dreams. He dressed himself and sallied forth, with as little noise as possible, on tiptoe as dawn was breaking.

"Are you going shooting, sir?" asked a servant whom he met.

"No, I am going to see the miller, to have the canal kept low, as I want to fish this evening."

He passed on to the road, and went in the direction of Nieva, waiting for the carriage with his seconds to catch him up, which it did in about half an hour. Peña and Don Rudesindo were much excited. When the young man entered the carriage they shook hands with great warmth and acquainted him with the conditions of the duel—they were to have twenty paces between them, and to advance and retreat as they pleased. This affair was by far the most serious one they had taken part in.

Gonzalo listened quietly; and he merely mentioned that he would have preferred swords, as he would have liked to have been nearer to his enemy. He did not seem upset, for the fact was, the excitement of meeting his foe face to face was an agreeable change from the torment of the preceding days, when the picture of his wife, in deshabelle, cowering in a corner, never left his mind's eye.

Besides, Gonzalo, like all those of an excessively vigorous temperament, was born for dangers; he revelled in them as if he were certain that the life coursing through his veins was inexhaustible. They did not reach the Soldevilla estate before half-past eight. The duke and his seconds had been waiting for some time. The former was not visible, being within the house. The marquis and Golarza escorted Peña and Don

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Rudesindo indoors, whilst Gonzalo took a turn in the garden. The Soldevilla place consisted of an old house half in ruins, with scanty, very old furniture, covered with dust; a rather large garden, more cared for than the house, and behind the garden an old orchard. The place was surrounded by meadows and lands, also belonging to the marquis.

The seconds discussed in the house whether the pistols brought by Peña, or those of the duke, should be used, and they decided upon those of the latter. Then the conditions of the duel were written out with a very bad pen of the major-domo's, for the marquis only wrote about one letter a year there. The pistols were loaded, and they sallied forth to seek a convenient spot for the combat.

"Manuel," said the marquis, seeing a man busy planting onions in one of the garden beds, "go away."

The servant looked at him in surprise.

"Be off, man," he reiterated with increased severity. "Go somewhere else."

The servant then left the garden, casting looks of astonishment and curiosity behind him.

A place was chosen in one of the narrowest paths in the centre of the garden, and Soldevilla went to fetch the duke.

Dawn broke that day in a clear sky; but very early after sunrise heavy, dark clouds gathered over that part of the coast, threatening an early discharge of heavy rain.

The light grew dimmer and dimmer to an extraordinary degree until it waned to a misty gray.

The duke appeared in a black frock-coat and broad-brimmed hat, rather paler than usual, but affecting a calm disdain, coupled with his usual courtesy. He had

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a fragrant cigar in his mouth with which he enveloped himself in light clouds of smoke as he walked by the side of Soldevilla.

Arriving at the appointed spot he gave a cold ceremonious greeting to the group of Gonzalo and his seconds, and vouchsafed them no further glance. After a few minutes' conference Peña put Gonzalo in position and handed him a loaded pistol. Soldevilla did the same with the duke. They had both removed their hats. The grandee retained his cigar in his left hand, and with an impassibility which savored of the theatrical, he gave long puffs at it. Great drops of rain, heralding a sharp shower, began to fall; and Peña finally called out:

"Gentleman, prepare—one, two, three."

The duke inclined his pistol and aimed. Gonzalo, also aiming, came forward with a pale face and with his eyes starting with fury.

His opponent waited until he arrived within fifteen paces with calmness, and moreover with the certainty of victory, for he was a consummate shot, and then fired.

The ball grazed the young man's cheek, piercing his skin and making it bleed; he stopped an instant, and then continued advancing. The seconds turned terribly pale. The duke dropped his pistol and stood awaiting his death with a bravery tinged with affectation and pride.

Gonzalo came forward precipitately until within two steps from his adversary. At that moment a rush of blood blinded him; his athletic temperament overcame his reason, his eyes shone with the glaring look of a wild beast, his lips trembled, his face contracted in a fearful manner, and, casting the pistol far from him, he leaped upon the traitor like a tiger. The duke, unable to resist the shock of the Colossus, was levelled to the

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ground. Then, roaring with rage, Gonzalo proceeded to kick him in the ribs. The seconds rushed to stop him, and the choleric Golarza caught him a blow on the head, to which Gonzalo seemed quite oblivious. Peña, indignant, raised his stick and directed a blow at Golarza. The Marquis of Soldevilla, zas! then gave another to Peña; and the whole party, mad with fury, began a hand-to-hand fight, whilst Gonzalo, satiating his pent-up thirst for vengeance, revelled in pummelling the well-nigh inert form of the duke.

At that moment the clouds burst in a downpour of rain, which became so heavy that the Marquis of Soldevilla quitted the field and repaired to the house for shelter.

The circle broke up as if by magic, for Don Rudesindo and Peña and Golarza followed his example.

However, before going off, it occurred to them to look round and see how their chiefs were getting on.

And by a unanimous movement of compassion, they seized hold of Gonzalo, whose mad rage was not yet exhausted.

The grip of the gentlemen brought him back to reason. He gave one long, sinister, astonished look, and then, without saying a word, he seized his hat and turned to the gate of the estate, whilst the duke was carried to the house in a dying condition.

The doctor summoned by Soldevilla (he had been shut up in a room during the duel, so as to avoid being present) now made a careful examination of the wounds and contusions of the injured man, and then declared his condition very serious.

Peña and Don Rudesindo found Gonzalo in the carriage weeping in despair.

"I am a brute!" he said . . . "a brute! What will

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you think of me ? I have committed a shameful deed. Forgive me."

The friends did their best to calm him. In truth neither of them was so shocked ; for, after all, the conduct of the duke had been so villainous that it deserved a villainous chastisement.

Pefia during the drive even cut jokes on the splendid licking administered to the grandee.

"There is no doubt, my boy, that grantees of strength can do more than grantees of rank," he said in his bell-like voice, enunciating every letter.

Gonzalo, like a great child that he was, passed from crying to laughing, and after the first smile he gave long and loud guffaws at his friends' jokes.

But the sight of his father-in-law's house plunged him again into depression. He had satisfied his righteous anger, but there remained a deep wound, of the anguish of which he had not yet been conscious, as long as it had been stifled by the excitement of the rage which had consumed him during those two days. Oh ! those grotesque little towers and minarets, witnesses of his honeymoon ; they made him so melancholy that it seemed as if some cruel hand were clutching at his heart within his breast. His friends, divining his wish to be alone, went on to Sarrio. Pablito was waiting for him at the house gate, and embraced him effusively and enthusiastically.

"Have you killed him ?" he asked in a low voice.

"I don't know—I think so," returned the young man in a still lower tone. "And your father ?"

"My father—he was here an instant ago—as soon as he saw you get out of the carriage safe and sound he got into the landau, which was waiting, ready, and went off to Sarrio."

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Gonzalo guessed the purport of Don Rosendo's journey, and his gloominess increased.

The two brothers-in-law then proceeded in silence to the house, and straight up to Gonzalo's room.

At the end of some moments, after throwing himself on the sofa and remaining motionless with his head sunk on his chest, he said to Pablito :

"Forgive me Pablo—but I want to be left alone, I am not equal to talking now."

So the brother-in-law withdrew.

At the end of some time, the door was re-opened without the young man noticing it, and a shadow slipped towards him and placed upon the nearest chair a tray with a cup and some plates.

"Oh, is that you, Cecilia ?"

"Whether you like it or not, you must take something, for I am certain you have not broken your fast," said the girl, dragging a little table forward and placing the steaming soup upon it.

"How good you are, Cecilia !" he exclaimed, seizing one of her hands. That exclamation was a cry of affection and enthusiasm, mingled with remorse that he had ever been able to doubt her.

"How good you are ! How good you are !" he repeated with tears in his eyes. "What you did that night ! Oh ! Nobody else would have done it, nobody else ! A saint descended from Heaven would not have done it—none of those living about you are worthy to kiss the dust from your feet."

And the young man, moved by his own words, sobbed bitterly whilst covering the hand he held with tears and kisses.

Cecilia, after turning first deep scarlet and then pale, said in a somewhat cold and distant tone :

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"Let go, let go," and at the same time quickly withdrew her hand. Seeing that her brother-in-law was somewhat hurt, she hastened to add :

"Look here, the less we talk of these things, and, if possible, the less we think of them, the better. The thing is now for you to take the soup. Then I will bring you some biscuits and a sandwich—you will like that ?"

"I have no appetite, Cecilia," he replied, making an effort to control his emotion.

"You must try——"

"No, no ; really I cannot swallow anything just now."

"But if I ask you ?" said the girl, and as she spoke a flush suffused her face.

"Then, well then, I'll take it—nobody can refuse you anything," he replied, taking the cup.

That gallant reply had a painful effect on Cecilia, and to avoid it being noticed she quickly left the room.

The Duke of Tornos lay for two or three days between life and death. But finally the fever left him, and the danger was over, although the recovery was very long, because he had two ribs and a jawbone fractured, besides terrible contusions in various parts of his body.

At the end of a month he was able to be moved to Madrid.

Gonzalo did not leave his father-in-law's house ; and at the end of five or six days after the duel, Don Rosendo returned from taking Ventura to the Ocaña Convent. But his life was sad and depressed. He declined Pablo's persuasions to go shooting or walking, and the thousand pretexts made by his father-in-law and his friends, who came to see him at Tejada, to induce him to get out, proved fruitless.

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Although Gonzalo did not openly refuse to accompany his friends, he managed to elude them and remained at home, where he sat alone.

His uncle, Don Melchor, came to see him, and advised him to travel for a time ; Gonzalo did not reject the idea, but he always postponed it on the pretext of want of health.

Don Rosendo, under the advice of las Cuevas and other friends, decided to move to Sarrio to see if the society of acquaintances might cheer the young man up a little. But all attempts to rouse him proved failures. Gonzalo let himself be taken to town without offering any objection, but he continued just as anxious to be alone, and to live retired from social life.

He only went out early in the morning and took a few turns at the end of the landing-stage, where he contemplated the sea with far-away eyes, sometimes so full of sadness that they would have alarmed any on-looker. As soon as the place became frequented, and the town awoke from its sleep, he hastily returned home.

Why did he not leave Sarrio, the scene of his troubles, and go for a time to Madrid, Paris, or London ? This was the question asked by all the people of the town, without receiving any satisfactory answer, nor was it easy for one to be found. There are very few competent to explain the secret origin, the final cause of human actions, because very few study psychology, deeming it useless, and those who are endowed with an understanding, both subtle and perspicacious, devote it solely to the study of self-interest, so that hardly anybody sounds this magic casket of feelings, desires, hopes, and contradictions called the human heart.

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How ashamed Gonzalo would have been if any one had told him that he did not leave Sarrio because he did not wish to quit the place associated with his wife, whom he still adored in secret, whilst feigning to hate her before the world! And nevertheless it was certainly so. As long as he remained in that house, all the bonds uniting him to her did not seem to be broken. The people about him were of her flesh and blood; they loved her still, culpable as she was, and they did not abuse her in his presence.

Ventura seemed to have left part of herself in the rooms and in the furniture; the bottles of essences and pots of pomades still stood half-used on the dressing-table; some of her cloaks and hats were still hanging on the pegs, and it seemed as if her fair, sunny head might appear at any moment from behind the curtains, whilst the air was still sweet with her favorite perfume. The husband, who had been disgracefully outraged, inhaled with delight this atmosphere of his wife, and lived in the shadow of her life, unwilling as he would have been to acknowledge it; and he lived, moreover, in the hope of one day pardoning her. This nobody knew—he had probably not formulated it to himself—nobody knew it but Cecilia, whose eyes, sharpened by love, divined her brother-in-law's most secret thoughts; and he evinced such an affectionate, enthusiastic, venerating feeling for her that it might easily have been confounded with love. Everybody's companionship, even that of his uncle, bored him more than hers.

However cast down he was with sad thoughts, which made scalding tears flow down his cheeks, the appearance of Cecilia in his room had a calming, soothing effect upon his grief.

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He followed her counsels with respect, and let himself be guided and coaxed by her like a sick child. When she delayed coming to him he grew impatient and made tender complaints about it, as if he had been a devoted lover.

When she was in the room his eyes never left her for an instant, so great was the influence of the charm or fascination she exercised on him ; those eyes expressed deep affection, admiration, respect, enthusiasm ; expressed, indeed, everything but love.

Cecilia read it all, but she could not see it without feeling the old pain and bitterness. Her gentle spirit was occasionally momentarily disturbed, and she seemed at times cold, irritable, and enigmatical, to the great surprise and sorrow of Gonzalo, who tried to cheer her up, and that with success. For the sad thought had had the same effect upon her mind as the fall of a stone on the peaceful waters of a lake, but, like the lake, her mind soon regained its purity and tranquillity.

One day, on suddenly entering the room of her brother-in-law, she found him examining a revolver.

When he saw her he turned red, and tried to hide it in the table drawer, which was open.

“What are you doing?”

“Nothing ; looking for some papers in this drawer, I came across this revolver, which I did not know I had, and so I am looking at it.”

Cecilia did not believe what he said, and the anxiety caused her by the incident made her keep a stricter watch on him.

Two months went by. Although the young man still persisted in his isolated, gloomy sort of life, there were a few faint signs of improvement. Once or twice

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he went out on horseback, and he talked to his father-in-law of going to Italy, as he had never been there.

The fresh impulse given to his depressed being was due to a pleasant thought, as pleasant as it was deceptive, and which he carefully kept from everybody.

Nevertheless, one night, on taking an affectionate leave of his sister-in-law, when retiring to rest, after much circumlocution and turning crimson, he asked after Ventura.

“What news is there of her?”

Cecilia gave him a chilly answer in as few words as possible.

Poor Gonzalo! If he had known that the treacherous wife, after whom he was asking, far from repenting, was furious against her family, covering them all with opprobrium, and threatening to go off with the first man at hand as soon as she came out of retreat, and shocking the Superior of the Convent with her language and pride.

From that day Gonzalo lost his aversion of referring to his wife, asking sometimes after her, and liking to mention her in conversation, but Cecilia still maintained the cold tone of her replies, quickly changing the subject.

What Don Rosendo had feared from the letters from Ocaña, at last happened.

The Superior of the Convent informed him one day that Ventura had escaped from the retreat, and, according to all reports, it was with the Duke of Tornos.

“The great humanitarian” (as he was termed by “The Light,” on a certain occasion) received the news with stoical fortitude. In fact, what did any purely individual sorrow signify in comparison with universal sorrow in the slow and sure march of hu-

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manity to its destiny? He had recently read a celebrated pamphlet called, "The March of the World," from the pen of a French writer, and with his brain refreshed and illuminated with its grand historical synthesis, he found strength to bear the blow.

Nevertheless, he tried to keep the news from his son-in-law, as he had not the same confidence in the loftiness of his spirit and the width of his views. It was therefore kept secret for some days, but suddenly it became current news in the town, without any one knowing who started it. Gonzalo, who always went early in the morning to the club, read it in a paragraph in "The Youth of Sarrio," which was as infamous as it was hypocritical.

"It is said in the town," it ran, "that a lady, the heroine of a certain romantic drama, enacted not long ago, has fled with her lover from the asylum in which her family had secluded her. We shall be sorry if this report be true, as it will affect certain persons who are well known and much esteemed in Sarriensan society."

Gonzalo felt that his heart was broken—the last ray of hope was gone.

He let the paper fall, and with a nervous smile, and in a strange, sharp voice, said to old Feliciano Gomez, who was the only person present:

"Do you know that my brute of a wife has gone off with her lover?"

Don Feliciano looked at him in surprise, for although little versed in smiles, he was taken aback at seeing the young man smile like that, and he replied sadly:

"Yes, Gonzalin; yes, I knew that it wasn't all over so soon— But, really, after what happened, this final blow ought not to cause you surprise. Once the rein is broken you can always imagine what will be the end."

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"And what for me. What—?" exclaimed the unhappy man, with the same smile, which expressed the ill-restrained excitement of body—. "Let her go—Very well!—let her go with God's blessing—I have nothing against it—Ah! if the law only permitted me to marry!—A month would not elapse without my doing so.—And why not? we will see, and why can I not do so?—Anyhow, if I can't marry for good, I can take up with somebody. I will carry on with some pretty girl, eh, Don Feliciano? And the devil take the rest!—for if she be bad by profession, my wife is so from choice."

Whilst making these ugly remarks, he walked up and down the room, threw off his hat, shrugged his shoulders, and gesticulated wildly.

Finally he roared with laughter.

"Look here Gonzalin," said Don Feliciano—"you have just weathered a storm; better weather is in store.—There is always good after bad. The things of the world have to be taken easily, my dear.—What is the good of putting oneself out, and upsetting one's digestion? Look at me. Last month I lost a ship.—Everybody came to condole with me, thinking I must be in despair, and I said to them:

"It is true I lost the "Juanita," but if I had lost the "Carmen," wouldn't it be much worse? for it might have been the one as much as the other, as both were afloat.' You have had a great blow—but keep up. Would it not be much worse if you were ill? You must think of that, my boy. Health is the first thing—you eat well, drink well, and those are the first things; the rest will all come right."

Gonzalo left the club without taking leave of the good Feliciano, who was still speaking.

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At home he told Don Rosendo of Ventura's flight, and, contrary to everybody's expectation, he did not seem to feel it much. On the contrary, from that day he showed signs of cheering up, and of going a little into society, which caused some surprise in the place.

He began paying visits to his friends, going out to coffee, walking in the streets, joking and discussing. There was no more talk of going away. To the astonishment of the town, at one of the balls of the Lyceum, he danced all night like a young fellow at his first dance.

Nevertheless Cecilia was very anxious. The animation of her brother-in-law was so strange, that it seemed more like an attack of nerves. Above all, this strange smile seemed like a grimace that had not left his lips since reading the paragraph in "The Youth of Sarrio," and it sometimes made her shudder.

The natural reaction came: after the days of insane excitement, he became a prey to a profound and gloomy depression. He remained three days in his room, hardly touching anything that Cecilia brought him, and what was worse still, without being able to sleep. With open, vacant eyes, he passed hours and hours stretched on his bed gazing into the dark.

On the third night he struck a light, dressed himself, wrote a long letter to his uncle, and one to Cecilia. When they were sealed, and laid on the table so as to be easily seen, he took out an Havana and, after lighting it at the candle, began walking up and down the room.

Before finishing the cigar he threw it away, opened the table-drawer and drew out the revolver which he kept there. On taking it to the light, he saw it was unloaded, which fact surprised him, because he was

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certain he had loaded it about a month before. What a strange thing ! Then he recollected that Cecilia had seen it in his hand, and a smile wreathed his lips. He then took up the cartridge box, and found it empty; the cartridges were all gone !

He stood pensive and motionless for some time. Then, as if awaking from a sleep, he shook his head and gave a sigh. After this, he put on his hat, opened the door, and very cautiously descended the staircase. On passing the door of the first floor he put his ear to it, and stood listening for a moment with his face convulsed and his hair on end. He thought he heard the voice of his wife calling him from within. The hallucination having passed, he descended the stairs, opened the outside door with the key hanging in the passage, and passed into the street.

It was not yet dawn, but in the east there was a little line of light that heralded the day. The morning was fresh, a sea-mist of fine rain was falling. He walked to the harbor without any hesitation, mounted the upper wall and looked out to sea, the horizon not being very extensive just then owing to the fog.

A northeast wind had been blowing for the past few days, which had made the sea very rough. Great, grand waves came rolling in from a distance, and dashed their gigantic forms against the end of the mole, and the foam flew straight up.

The eyes of the young man were soon directed to a launch about to enter the harbor, as it danced like a walnut shell upon the waves. Its entrance interested him, and he followed all its peripatetics with as much attention as if he were concerned in it.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, when the entrance to the harbor was effected, his thoughts

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resumed their course, and sighing and murmuring "Come," he went forward and leant against the wall. As the tide rose higher, a larger wave than the rest drenched him with its foam. The unexpected bath was agreeable to him, as it refreshed him physically. He stood waiting for some time to see if another would come with equal force, but none came, so he continued his walk.

Arriving at the end of the mole he threw himself down on the mole and fixed his melancholy gaze on the waves coming in.

It was the same spot where, a few years previously, he had had the conversation with his uncle about breaking off his engagement with Cecilia and marrying Ventura.

The stern, severe words of the old man seemed now to reëcho in his ears :

"God cannot help the man who breaks his word. The journey is long, the sea wide and powerful, and what is merely pretty is soon submerged in the swell."

"How right my uncle was !" thought the young man, without turning his eyes from the sea.

"Bah !" he muttered at the end of a few minutes, "if I had been a hundred times in the same position I should have done the same. There are fatalities. That woman has inoculated my blood with poison which can only be ejected with its last drop."

He stood some time again lost in thought. The sea water, which had immersed him, and the rain, which still incessantly fell, chilled him to the bone. The morning dawned damp and foggy. It was not like that beautiful night when, after talking with his uncle, he had then also been plunged in thought. Then the magnificent splendor of the heavens spangled with

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stars, the crystal clearness of the water, in which the light of the moon was reflected, and the soft breeze whispered to him of death—yea, but it was in sweet, harmonious, friendly strains, like the voice of a friend calling him to rest. But now it was as if he heard a cry of desolation, a threat: "Come, come, death is very sad, but life is the saddest of all!"

"We must make an end of this," he said, raising his head. He moved forward and stretched out his arms.

But at the moment, fearing that the instinct of self-preservation would certainly make him swim, he stopped.

He looked all round in search of some weight, and his eyes fell upon the anchor of a smack, which lay below on the lower wall. He jumped down, seized it, cut a piece of rope from a launch with his knife, lashed it to the anchor, and, like a gymnast anxious to exhibit to the public the prodigious power of his muscles, he scaled the steps with his burden. Once there he tied the cord to his neck, put his foot upon the wall, and, with the anchor in his arms, he precipitated himself into the deep. His colossal form made a great vacuum in the waters, which closed immediately over him. The deep sea extinguished that spark of life with the same indifference as it had so many others.

A sailor, seeing him from a distance, ran crying:

"A man in the water!"

Three or four others from boats at hand followed, and in a few minutes there was a crowd of twenty or thirty at the end of the landing-stage.

"Who was it? Do you know him?" was asked of him who had seen him.

"I think it was Don Gonzalo."

"The *alcalde*?"

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"Yes."

"Very likely, very likely. . . . Oh ! these women !"

The news spread rapidly through the town, and a crowd of people hastened to the port. Two men in a boat prodded with a pole in the water's depths, without encountering the body of the unhappy young man. At last they came across it, and with the help of a hook they brought it to light, just as Melchor, upset, excited, and hatless, arrived at the port to receive the terrible blow.

"Son of my heart !" cried the poor old man when he saw his nephew's body in the water ; then utterly collapsing, he fell unconscious into the arms of the people about him.

The corpse of the suicide was laid in the town hall awaiting the arrival of the magistrate, and the spectacle made a profound impression upon the bystanders, who numbered amongst them persons from the rival parties.

After the arrival of the Justice of the Peace, due instructions were given and the body was placed on a truck and carried to its home, as Don Rosendo claimed it on hearing the news. It was a very sad procession that passed through the town, the people crowded the windows with pale and sad faces, for Gonzalo was a universal favorite.

Don Rosendo was overwhelmed with grief, and not wishing to see the corpse of his son-in-law, he shut himself in his room, but he gave orders to have the body placed in the best drawing-room on a table covered with velvet, and flowers and wreaths to be sent from all parts, and preparations for a grand funeral to be made.

Cecilia, with one of those heroic efforts over body

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and mind which characterized her, managed to bury her grief in the depths of her own heart. She was seen looking livid, but tranquil, going about the house, doing what was necessary for the reception of her brother-in-law's body. When it arrived she herself helped to arrange it after it had been shrouded in its winding-sheet. She covered it with flowers, she lighted the candles, and she draped the room with black. Then she arranged for a Sister of Charity to share the watch by the corpse with herself.

At last they were left alone. They prayed for a long time on their knees ; and when the orisons were over, Cecilia asked the Sister to go to the kitchen to order tea, as she was quite faint.

As soon as the Sister left the room, Cecilia rose quickly, drew out some scissors, cut a lock of her brother-in-law's hair and hid it in her bosom ; then she cut a tress from her own head, and trembling with agitation, she placed it between the crossed hands of the dead man.

Then, after gazing at him for an instant, she lowered her head and covered the inanimate face with kisses—the first and the last that she ever gave him.

Then the wife, the man's true and only wife, powerless to cope with such a sorrow, fell senseless to the ground.

THE END.



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